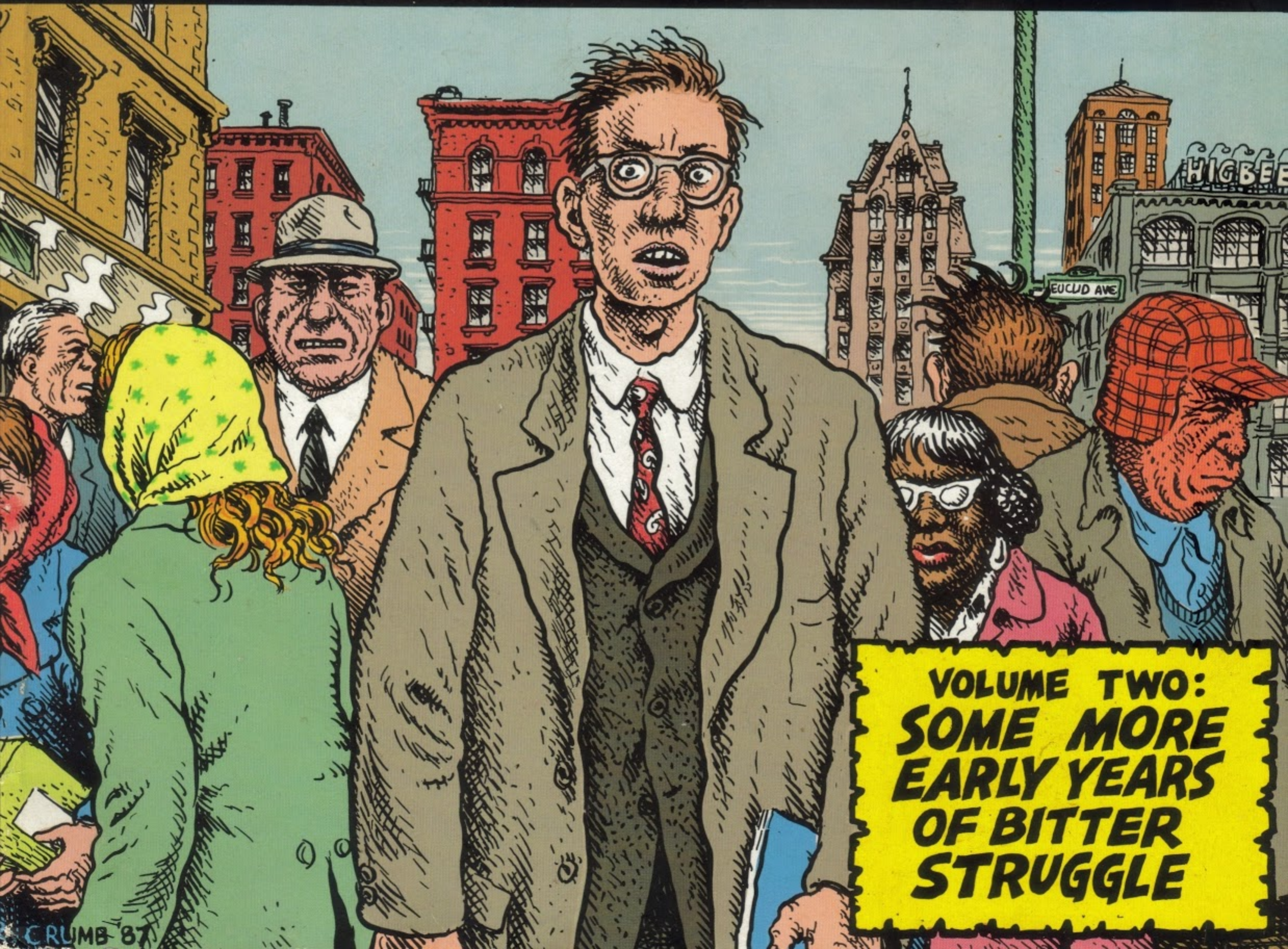


The COMPLETE CRUMB COMICS



VOLUME TWO:
SOME MORE
EARLY YEARS
OF BITTER
STRUGGLE

Robert Crumb, 18, high school graduate, unemployed, stood at the edge of a deserted swimming pool in Dover, Delaware. He was trying to decide whether to commit suicide by throwing himself in. Alienated at home by his battling parents, stymied by art projects he was finding vain and fruitless, frustrated by girls and sex (or the lack of them), disgusted by the 1962-era materialism he saw around him, with no circle of friends and no vision or hope of anything better, he was tempted by "complete oblivion. . . I stood by the pool for about half an hour, trying to get up the courage to jump in."

Then he turned, stoop-shouldered, head lowered, and shuffled away; and *Zap Comix*, Fritz the Cat, Mr. Natural, and a mind-blowing parade of creations to come were saved from "complete oblivion."

Just at this new low point, he received a letter that ultimately would change every aspect of his life. As so often happens, a trivial event started things: My roommate, Dave Sroczyński, with whom I was sharing an apartment on Cleveland's Carnegie Avenue, moved out. So I wrote Robert and asked him if he'd like to cut the family tie, join me, and try his luck in my home town. "That was a momentous occasion in my life," he said later, "It was the only opportunity or prospect I had in the world."

But work prospects weren't bright. I suggested he try the Ohio State employment office. The job counselor who interviewed Robert didn't even look at his portfolio, but that didn't matter: He simply got on the phone and called up American Greetings, the nation's number two greeting card publisher (after Hallmark), who were located on Cleveland's West Side lakefront. Robert was mildly shocked when he was told to report to the Training Department the following Monday. "I couldn't believe I had an art job—here I am just starting out. . . I just assumed that they only hired real professionals, but as a matter of fact they hired dozens of incompetent kids out of art school to do color separations." The Training Department bore an eerie resemblance to boot camp, as formerly conducted by Robert's father (a one-time Marine Corps drill instructor), with airbrushes instead of bayonets. Robert's luck didn't improve with his first promotion at American Greetings, which came later that winter. It was "worse than the training department." Sometimes it took Robert a full five-day week just to do separations for one card. Robert looked at the Kafkaesque scene around him and shuddered. Some of his fellow inmates had been doing separations in that room for 20 years, including some highly skilled craftsmen—Europeans whose mastery of intricate engraving techniques prevented them from ever being promoted to the rarefied ranks of Finished Art.

Robert's confidence in a future for his art had never been lower. "I'd pretty much given up on being a professional comic artist. . . I was compelled to draw them just for my own amusement, and thought someday maybe they'd be appreciated. I didn't think about getting any of that stuff published."

Another typically '60s life crisis now loomed: Robert's letter from his draft board. The idea of his scrawny form in khakis, wielding a bayonet against our

Continued on back flap—

THE COMPLETE CRUMB

THE COMPLETE CRUMB

VOLUME 2

**SOME MORE
EARLY YEARS OF
BITTER STRUGGLE**

R. CRUMB

Edited by Gary Groth
with Robert Fiore

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“The Best Location In The Nation...”

by Marty Pahls

Robert Crumb, 18, high school graduate, unemployed, stood at the edge of a deserted swimming pool in Dover, Delaware. He was trying to decide whether to commit suicide by throwing himself in. Alienated at home by his battling parents, stymied by art projects he was finding vain and fruitless, frustrated with girls and sex (or the lack of them), disgusted by the 1962-era materialism he saw around him, with no circle of friends and no vision or hope of anything better, he was tempted by “complete oblivion... I stood by the pool for about half an hour, trying to get up the courage to jump in.”

Then he turned, stoop-shouldered, head lowered, and shuffled away; and *Zap Comics*, Fritz the Cat, Mr. Natural, and a mind-blowing parade of creations to come were saved from “complete oblivion.”

Shortly before, Robert had visited me and my family in Kent, Ohio, where I was busy graduating from college and planning, sheepskin in hand, to invade the job market. We’d hunted old phonograph records, talked endlessly about comics, and hung out at the Student Union, where I introduced Robert to my friends and to my girl, Barb Brock (“the dear sweet,” he called her). “Before I went on that trip,” he says, “I was really at the lowest point. After that I saw that there was some hope of connecting with the outside world. It was the first time I’d ever been in any kind of university scene... I felt that I could connect somehow with those kinds of people.”

Brother Charles, whose enthusiasm for comics had started them both drawing when they were in grade school, wasn’t much help at lifting Robert’s spirits. “I was in livid fear of his judgment of my work—his criticism or his comments. He would criticize and encourage, both. He

was a hard taskmaster.” But Charles’s compulsion to draw waned rapidly after their first venture in publishing, the humorzine *Foo*, failed to sell at Dover High School.

Robert’s brooding, lonely feelings were reflected by the “Billy Bean” drawings in his ever-present sketchbooks. “The little character with the hair parted in the middle is supposed to be the inner me sorta... With him I portray actual experiences of my own, with emphasis on the lovelorn side of my nature.”

That side was goaded to new heights of frustration when Joan Taber—another Dover High graduate, who might have stepped out of a later Crumb drawing—drifted into his life. Their relationship was “sombre and intense. We would walk around Dover and sit by the lake, talk about life and philosophy: what does it all mean and that kind of stuff.

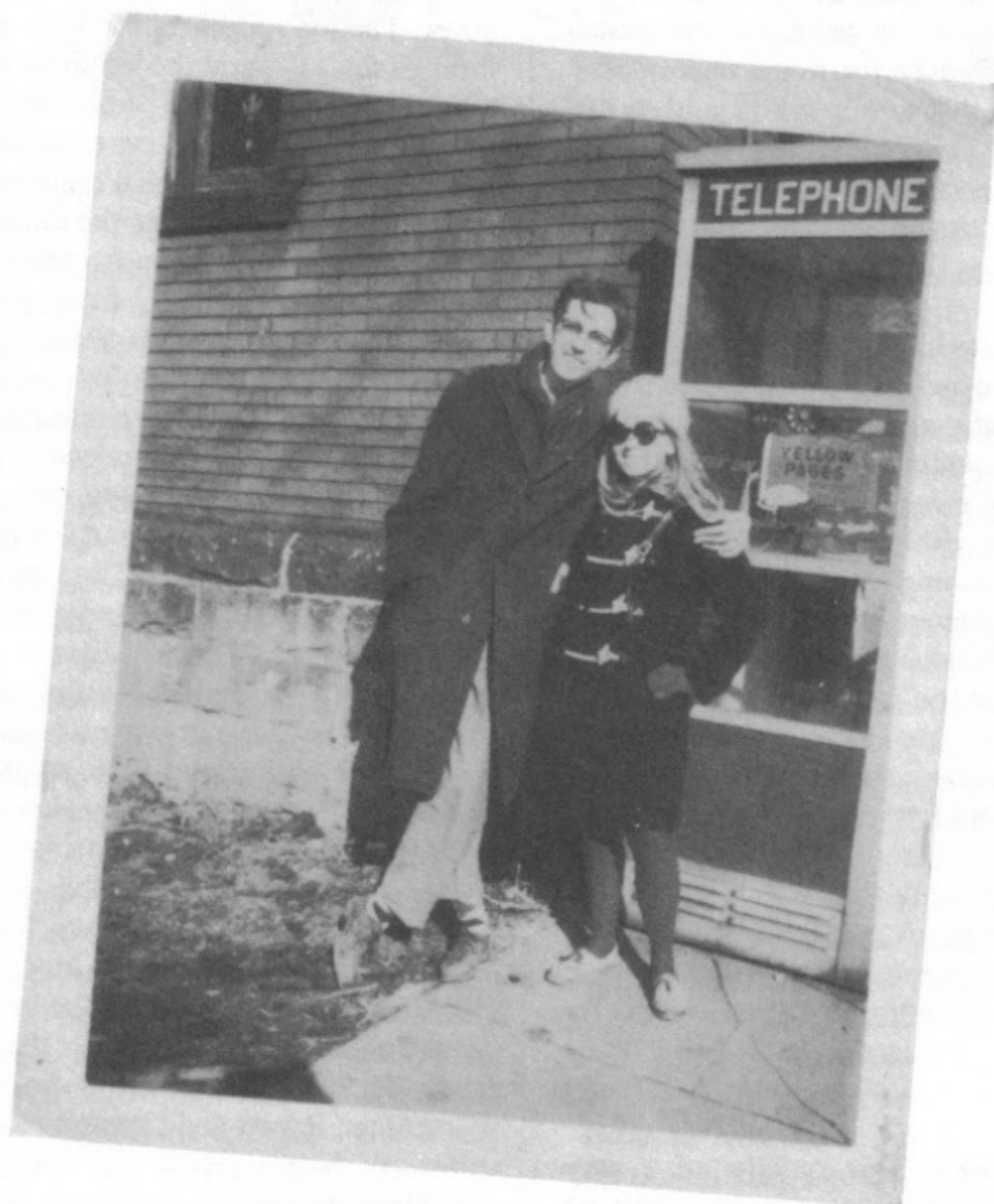
“I didn’t know how to break the sex barrier. I had this heavy romantic come-on to any girl who paid any attention to me at all. It was obvious to her that I was sexually really hungry and desperate.” But Robert was also helplessly shy, and Joan Taber soon drifted out again.

Just at this new low point, he received a letter that ultimately would change every aspect of his life. As so often happens, a

trivial event started things: my roommate, Dave Sroczynski, with whom I was sharing an apartment on Cleveland’s Carnegie Avenue, moved out. So I wrote Robert and asked him if he’d like to cut the family tie, join me, and try his luck in my home town. “That was a momentous occasion in my life. Charles had no plans to do anything. The way my mother was I could have stayed there indefinitely. It was the only opportunity or prospect I had in the world.”

But work prospects weren’t bright and Robert was realistic about the situation. “When I first got to Cleveland I had no idea of getting any art job at all. I remember going and applying for stock clerk positions at Higbee’s and department stores down around Public Square.” Then I suggested he try the Ohio state employment office. “I had the semblance of a portfolio, just in case: high school newspaper covers, fake album covers, the black-and-white *Arcade* cover with the rock ‘n’ roll singer and his manager; stuff like that.”

The job counselor who interviewed Robert didn’t even look at the portfolio, but that didn’t matter: he simply got on the phone and called up American Greetings, the nation’s number-two greeting card publisher (after Hallmark), who were



located on Cleveland's West Side lake-front. "I'll always remember that old guy," says Robert. "He gave me my break." This "sell job" worked and Robert took the rapid transit out to the grim red-brick complex (once a factory for Winton and Baker motorcars and Otis elevators) and was scrutinized by the personnel man, "an Armenian with pores the size of your thumb."

"I just assumed that they only hired real professionals, but as a matter of fact they hired dozens of incompetent kids out of art school to do color separations. *Maybe* you could work your way up to doing those stupid cards." Thus Robert was mildly shocked when he was told to report to the Training Department the following Monday. "I couldn't believe I had an art job—here I am just starting out. I just thought I was the luckiest guy in the world I had that crummy job. . . I assumed I would fail in Cleveland and have to go home." A year or two before, Charles had fled the family meatgrinder for California, and returned a month later with his tail between his legs, never to try again.

The training department bore an eerie resemblance to boot camp, as formerly conducted by Robert's father (a one-time Marine Corps drill instructor), with airbrushes instead of bayonets. Separators, seated at light tables, were trained to render absolutely faultless copies of tempera and watercolor paintings and pastel drawings. "Some artist would make a card—he'd paint that scrollwork in gold on the original art. The color separator had to put a piece of acetate over the original art and trace it very exactly and precisely in black ink—and that would be the gold separation."

It was incredibly precise work, involving croquille and mechanical Rapidograph drawing pens and India ink—materials that rough-pencil sketcher Robert had stayed away from till now. Also, "I learned how to use airbrushes and do different color tones—grey tones, ten to 90 percent." Separators had to rub on various layers of adhesive-backed masking paper: "And, while you're pulling the mask off, if you just happen to nick the surface of the acetate where you airbrushed a grey tone, it would be ruined. People were dropping like flies in the training department. They couldn't cut it."

"Everything American Greetings did was hand-separated. The average color separator was getting 85 bucks a week. By the time I realized what I was being trained to do, I thought it was really bizarre!"

Robert spent four months of a very bleak Cleveland winter in the Training Department. "I'll always remember that

period as being dark." To reach the time clock ahead of punch-in time, he had to get up before dawn, plow through frozen snowdrifts across East Boulevard and up the steps to the rapid transit platform, then shiver in the blasting wind off Lake Erie waiting for a train that would carry him to the other side of the city, where a bus ride and another cold, slippery walk brought him to the greeting-card fortress. It would be long after dark when he returned to our basement apartment in a decaying, soot-grimed building at East 107th and Carnegie (now long torn down).

I can remember the sound of Robert's footsteps approaching down the narrow



hallway—slow, weary, shuffling, like a suffering character out of a Dostoevski novel. The job routine bored him, staring through the acetate at the lightboard made his eyes ache—but, as I preached to him, he was learning hand-to-eye coordination, learning to use professional materials and techniques. *And* receiving the munificent sum of \$60 a week! But wasn't this better than going to art school, where you had to pay *them*, with no guarantee of a job even if you graduated? Robert pulled his earmuff-framed head down into the collar of his Salvation Army store coat, chewed his frostbitten lip, and hung on.

Those were the days when Cleveland's boosters were calling it "The Best Location in the Nation." (Local wags immediately redubbed it "The Mistake on the Lake.") Born in Cleveland, I was endlessly fascinated by its gritty streets and buildings, sagging frame houses, smoky railyards, and the high weatherbeaten bridges over "the flats," low-lying factory tracts strung for miles along the winding, copper-colored Cuyahoga River. Like a lot of Clevelanders, I harbor a kind of perverse civic pride just below the surface—where else can you find a river that's officially declared a fire hazard?—so, in spite of weather, Robert and I spent many of our off-work hours riding the busses and trackless trolleys up and down Superior Avenue, Lorain Avenue, Buckeye Road,

Woodland, Madison, Denison, from Public Square to Rocky River or Euclid Beach amusement park and points in between.

In 1962, one of the most spectacularly seedy areas of the city was near our own apartment, centered a few blocks away at East 105th Street and Euclid Avenue. Adjacent to Case-Western Reserve University, Severance Hall, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, it had been a middle-class Jewish area in the 1920s. But now it was the transportation hub, entertainment center, and focus of streetlife for Cleveland's enormous black population. A stroll down Euclid, from Cleveland Clinic and Abood's Foods at East 100th, past the plywood-shuttered Alhambra Theatre and the humanity-clogged crossroads itself (it was at East 105th and Euclid that the nation's first traffic light is said to have been installed, in 1914) to the Greyhound station at East 107th, took you past countless bars (all of them churning out electric jazz organ music), rib joints, conk parlors, storefront tabernacles, and, of course, Rebel's 13-Cent Hamburgers. Not to mention, every night along the south side of Euclid between Hunnerd-Five and Hunnerd-Seven, one of the choicest collections of streetwalkers in Christendom.

Robert, innocent that he was, discovered them one evening while walking home from the bus. "This pimp came up to me and said, 'Hey, man, could you use a little heater for tonight?' I said, 'Gee, I don't know.' I asked him, 'How much does it cost?' and I told him, 'The idea's kind of interesting, but you know I've never slept with a woman. I'm kinda shy.'"

"He practically fell down on the ground—he couldn't believe it. Nineteen years old and never slept with a woman! Just unheard of in his world! The first time *he* did it, he was 12. 'Well, any time you're ready, just let me know—I'll line you up.'"

Frustration was all the more bitter for Robert because Barb was bussing up from Ohio State University in Columbus to spend every third or fourth weekend with me; and, in between, there were other girls. When privacy demanded, he would pull on his coat, shuffle to the door, and trudge the snowy streets, or warm his toes in the Reserve student union, drinking a half-pint carton of milk and drawing in his composition books the sketches and Fritz stories presented here for the first time. Later, the books would be passed around, never failing to elicit awed interest from the female guests—which generally caused Robert to beat a blushing retreat into the next room.

Nevertheless, his longing for contact with the opposite sex was finding an outlet—of a sort. "There was this black girl that

used to get on the rapid every day at the stop after University Circle. She'd always sit behind me and we'd play footsie under the seat. She was real bold about it, too. This went on for a couple of months. She'd always get off downtown—I never spoke to her. One time she got on and she almost sat down next to me, and then decided not to. She sat down behind me and we played footsie.

"She was real attractive—tall, with glasses. I remember one time we were playing footsie and this black guy got on the rapid and sat down next to her and handed her all this jive. She wasn't saying much to him, and all the time we were playing footsie under the seat."

At Christmas 1962 Robert paid a visit to the family, who had moved to Upper Darby, just outside Philadelphia. Things were as grim as ever: "I've never since stayed there more than three days at a time." Charles was still obsessed with his own hermetically sealed, inward world. There were a few final attempts at two-man comics, with Robert drawing his characters and dialogue (as well as all the backgrounds) in the composition book, and Charles responding for a few pages with his characters and dialogue. But then Charles would lose interest rapidly, leaving Robert to supply all cues, and it soon became clear that the days of the two-mans were over.

Robert's confidence in a future for his art had never been lower. "I'd pretty much given up on being a professional comic artist... I was compelled to draw them just for my own satisfaction, and thought someday maybe they'd be appreciated. I didn't think about getting any of that stuff published."

Shortly after Christmas, Robert was back in Cleveland. "On New Year's Eve we went down to Public Square and went in a hamburger joint. This bum—the waitress started shaking him: 'Hey! Wake up! Wake up!' And his head slid off the counter, and there was this big smear of blood. He just fell on the floor, and she said, 'Oh shit! We got out of there!'"

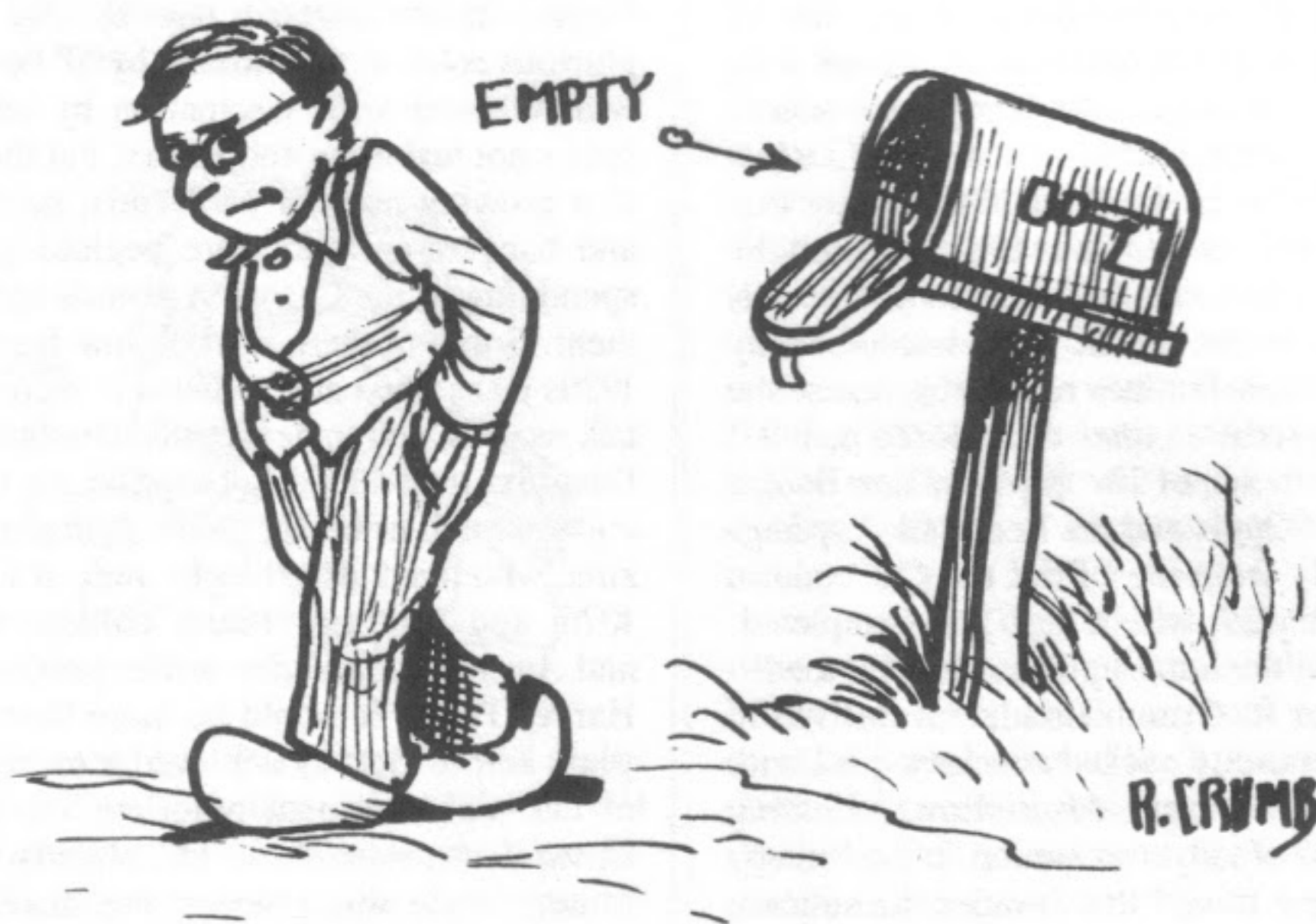
Around this time, also, Robert experienced another epiphany—a somewhat more positive one that turned out to be prophetic, and then some. Walking home from the bus one night he noticed a tiny fortune-telling shop in a storefront. "There was a little Gypsy parlor there, right on 105th Street... A little hole-in-the-wall place... Just out of curiosity I went in there.

"She was very quick. Cost me two bucks. She said, 'Don't worry. You luck's agonna change—don't worry.'"

Robert's luck didn't improve with his first promotion at American Greetings,

which came later that winter. "I remember going up my first day in Color Separation, and—'OK, here's your first job.' Glop! Throw this card on my drawing table. It's this cute puppydog drawn by a girl artist, with real rough loose brushstrokes and outlines in some kind of textured pencil... Then a little bit of drybrush or colored pencil for the cheeks. 'Oh my God, how am I gonna duplicate this?' The artists who did the original gave no thought for the problems of the separator at all... The color separators were the bottom of the ladder."

This work was obviously not going to be R. Crumb's glass of tea. It was "worse



than the training department." Sometimes it took Robert a full five-day week just to do separations for one card. He was considered "a little slow"—not surprising for a beginner—but this didn't prevent him from receiving a \$5-a-week raise.

Robert looked at the Kafkaesque scene around him and shuddered. Some of his fellow inmates had been doing separations in that room for 20 years, including some highly skilled craftsmen—Europeans whose mastery of intricate engraving techniques prevented them from ever being promoted to the rarefied ranks of Finished Art. "People that worked there were all a little bit batty. They used to make crazy jungle noises over the cubicles at each other all day—bird calls and weird sounds.

"There were like a hundred artists in this giant room. The partitions were only four feet tall because they had these 'checkers' that would walk up and down the aisle between the cubicles—their heads were right over the partition level. They could look and make sure what you were doing. They had clipboards.

"This one guy had a German accent and a little goatee. Sometimes my eyes would get so tired from the lightboard I'd just start to nod out. He would tap you on the shoulder—'Hey! Gedt to vork!' I was really thinking about quitting—it was just too demanding."

But Robert stuck to it. Sticking to it seems to have been an AG tradition. The company's founder, Jacob Saperstein, died in 1987 at age 102, still in command—his last birthday request having reportedly been a new book on computer applications. The legend was that he started out around the turn of the century peddling postcards from a pushcart on Russian Hill.

During Robert's tenure, operations were in the hands of his sons, who had changed their name to Stone. "There was a lot of anti-Semitism in the lower echelons—pretty much across the board among all the artists and a lot of the writers. The bosses were these stereotypical ruthless Jewish characters. There weren't too many Jewish artists or writers working there."

There wasn't any union, either, and Robert paints a picture very few notches above a garment-district loft before the Triangle Fire. During a guided tour of the production plant, he observed "all these Okie rednecks working at machines. They had this embossing stamper, and a woman had to put the cards in these things coming down. I said, 'Jeez! Isn't that a little dangerous there for your fingers?' and the guy said, 'NONOIT'SNOTDANGEROUSAT-ALL!' She said, 'The h-a-i-l it isn't!' And the guy whisked us away."

Robert returned from his Christmas visit to Philadelphia with an incredible array of beautiful multi-hued Prismacolor pencils. He would create *Arcade* covers

by drawing (and lettering in reverse) on transparent acetate in India ink, then coloring with the Prismacolors on the frosted or matte side. Turning the sheet over, he would have a cover for his latest composition book that featured his increasingly tight, skilled rendering—plus color with subtlety and depth approaching the 19th-century chromolithographed cartoons of Dalrymple, Davenport, and Kemble that we admired in the ancient pages of *Puck* and *Judge*.

These beautiful results—plus his still-unrequited sex urge—inspired his biggest art project to date. “I kinda had a crush on this girl artist at AG—giant Latvian girl with this lit-tle ti-ny voice. I was going to do this book and just give it to her.”

The story was rendered on one side of each page in a bound hardcover book with blank sheets—probably a paper salesman’s sample liberated from American Greetings. “The tricky thing about doing that *Big Yum Yum Book* was I had to pencil the panels really carefully ’cause I put the color on *over* the pencil. There had to be only the thinnest outlines remaining, ’cause the inking went on *after* the colored pencil.”

The theme of *The Big Yum Yum Book*’s story, “Oggie and the Beanstalk,” springs directly from the “Fritz the Cat” tale in *Arcade* #29, which he’d just completed. Ogden, the hung-up ne’er-do-well toad—another R. Crumb simulacrum—lived in an island-city packed cheek-by-jowl with animals of every description, including swarms of ladybugs similar to the “creepy crawling thing” that invades the suitcase in the “Fritz” story. Just as Fritz inadvertently brings on disaster by starting a fire in the subway, Oggie provokes the wrath of the gods by drunkenly stomping a passel of ladybugs—then attempting to conceal his crime by burying them under the stone floor. Like Jack’s beans, they sprout into a monster growth. It threatens to destroy the city. Carried into the sky by the beanstalk, Oggie lands on a lush green planet and meets its sole inhabitant—a giant, *zaftig*, naked teen-age girl named Guntra.

Getting up early, going to bed late, Robert worked on *The Big Yum Yum Book* through the frigid early months of 1963—before work, after work, weekends, in dim light on a plain kitchen table, breaking only for runs to Godfrey Holmes to buy more Prismacolors. (“I didn’t even get a drawing board till about 1980,” he admits.) Soon, not unnaturally, he decided *not* to give it to its heroine’s namesake. Ultimately, however, Robert did give away *The Big Yum Yum Book*—to his first wife, Dana. She holds the copyright (the book was published by The Scrimshaw Press, San Francisco, 1975), but would not license the publication rights to Fantagraphics Books—which is why it isn’t here.

The rise, fall, and metamorphosis of Oggie, as it accreted day by day in glorious color in the little 5” by 8” book, was followed with fascination by other eyes—not just mine and Barb’s, but those of a growing number of friends, guests, and hangers-on who were beginning to spend time at the Carnegie Avenue apartment. Some of them were fellow fans of 1920s jazz, who came to listen to records, talk records, and trade records. Discophile Dave Ski introduced Robert and me to a collector and critic for *Down Beat* magazine, who lived three blocks away at East 107th and Deering—future collaborator and *American Splendor* writer/publisher Harvey Pekar. It would be more than 20 years before Harvey achieved a measure of late-night national notoriety on *The David Letterman Show*, but already his frenetic style was present: the distilled energy, waving arms, beads of sweat, flashing eyes—the working-class social critique, even the woman troubles. “I just thought Harvey was the classic beatnik,” says Robert. “This wild intense Jewish guy into bebop music—kind of talked jive lingo a little bit—this real seething character. He had these wacky modern-art paintings in his place—which he still has: the same cruddy paintings, but they’re all covered with grime.”

Harvey had grown up in a tough racially-mixed area around East 131st and



Kinsman. Though he’s a believer in peace and quiet, even to the extent of never seeking a job more vocationally aggressive than hospital clerk, his readiness to hold his own when pressed was already becoming a local legend. There was the story that Harvey came home one day, found a six-foot-plus intruder rifling his apartment, grabbed the luckless fellow by the collar and the seat of his pants, frogmarched him to the front porch, and dumped him down the steps.

At any rate, Robert vouches for one example of Pekar’s tenacity from the early ’70s, when “urban removal” finally obliterated our gloriously grungy neighborhood. “Harvey was one of the last hold-outs on Deering. He lived in one of this old row of houses and they were tearing them down, starting at the eastern end. He was still living there—and the next house was *gone*. He just didn’t want to move.”

Another vaguely music-oriented clique orbited around La Cave, a folknik coffee house in a capacious basement directly across Euclid from Prosty Row. Although the sounds were rarely to Robert’s taste (“Joan Baez goody-goody shrieking”), the ambience did attract Western Reserve coeds and high school girls down from Cleveland Heights, with doe eyes, pressed hair, and a penchant for remembering the correct words (if not the correct chord changes) to any protest ditty from *Sing Out!* at the drop of a capo.

La Cave was an evenings-only, performance-oriented venue, not a place for chess games and quiet prolonged dissection of Joyce, Freud, and Marx. But a nascent artsy-leftsy fringe did cluster under the espresso fumes, and Robert and I began milling with them on their own turf, which tended to center a mile or so out Euclid, around a calm backwater called Hessler Road. Narrow, tree-lined, and enclosed by old three-story row houses, Hessler was a street of quiet charm, one of the last in Cleveland to retain a stretch of its original wooden paving blocks. Several members of the Cleveland Orchestra, then under George Szell, had apartments there (Severance Hall was just a few blocks away) and, on a warm summer



evening when everyone's windows were open, you could stroll down the street and get quite a concert as they practiced.

For Robert the big attraction on Hessler was the apartment of three girls who surfaced at La Cave from time to time: Gail, Karen, and Roberta. "The first time I ever got involved with women was with these three crazies. I was so thrilled I was actually accepted by these girls. . . I was kinda flirting with Roberta and she was going for it. They were all into being wild and having fun. That was a particularly momentous occasion, the night I met them. They thought I was cool; they liked my artwork."

The dominatrix of this roost was definitely Gail, who "looked like a chubbier Liz Taylor. Schizoid Jewish brat-girl—she was a really irritating obnoxious person, but she let me kiss her and make out with her. . . When they locked her in the mental ward, I was the only one who visited her in the hospital. I remember going to see her and they had this locked door with a window in it. . . I remember her little face peering out at me before they unlocked the door."

The favors didn't all flow in one direction between Gail and Robert. "I used to stay after work for hours every night working on these things to give girls. . . A fantastic locomotive with a face on the front of it and all painted silver. . . A cathedral-radio-shaped thing with a window with a doll in there. You pulled this knob and this little frog comes out from under her dress." For Gail he concocted "another radio thing. . . hearts all around it that were cut out, and faces inside these hearts that I got out of an old arcade machine from Gene's Funny House on Ninth Street, with these heart-shaped windows on them with little faces of 'your secret lover.'"

But this love gift had a short life. "I went over there one day and saw it all torn apart. I went, 'What happened to that thing I made you?' She said, 'Oh, I had a little attack of paranoia and I thought there was a bomb in it and I tore it apart, ha ha ha.' Very amusing—I spent two weeks working on it."

The contrast could hardly have been greater between Robert's new friends and his fellow-sufferers back in Color Separation. "The ones that I met at American Greetings were all working class, with a different attitude. Some of those people were shocked when I told them that I lived on the East Side, around 105th and Euclid." There was one AG friend, however, who was definitely *not* shocked. Larry Raybourne had grown up in a small-time theatrical family downtown on West Superior, where a cliff-face of crumbling

bay-windowed brownstones drops from the old High Level Bridge abutment into the flats. A writer for Hi Brows, American Greetings' new, wisecracking line of 4" by 9" cartoon cards, Raybourne had also absorbed more than his share of life's vicissitudes and shared Robert's predilection for the mordant, kinky response.

Robert's art fascinated Raybourne—especially the tiny cartoon figures and drawings with which he compulsively filled the white paper taped around the frosted glass of his light table. Raybourne began bringing along friends from Hi Brows, eventually including Tom Wilson, head of the department. Wilson took a good look at the light-table doodlings, pulled a few strings, and, in the summer of 1963, Robert was transferred to the Hi Brow Department.



"It was totally different from Color Separation," Robert recalls. "It was shocking at first." The people were interesting and creative, the pace was relaxed, and, best of all, there were no "checkers." "All those guys used to come up to me when I first worked there and whisper to me, 'Crumb, slow down, you're making us look bad. You don't have to work that hard up here. They're going to up their expectations of our production level if you keep this up.' I thought they were kidding. I couldn't comprehend the idea they didn't want you to work as hard as you could."

Now Robert felt he'd been brainwashed "by the slavedrivers downstairs in the galley. Suddenly it dawned on me I was getting paid more money to do less work—how unfair the whole system was. All these writers and artists and everything, but in this industrial setting." It was weirdly parallel to the Fritz Lang movie *Metro-polis*, only with the dynamos churning out "Happy Birthday" and "Get Well Soon" instead of power-plant energy.

Even the neighborhood where American Greetings was located had, under its surface ordinariness, a welter of quirky details. When I was little, my grandparents had lived just a short walk away, on West 91st Street, and from my sailor-suit days

I'd been familiar with every brick side-street and dusty storefront: Viking Road, Baltic Road, Silk Avenue; the Stradno Violin Repair Shop, Quare's Drug Store; Mayflower Trucking, with the same dim scale-model trailer in the same flyspecked window that had sat there when I went by in my Taylor Tot.

This part of Cleveland—which, so far as I know, never was referred to by a district or neighborhood name—in 1963 stood frozen in time. (One mildly delirious night a few years later, Robert and I figured out that it was the original of the Moppets' and Thompkins' neighborhood in *Little Lulu*.) On the south side of Detroit Avenue at West 76th "there was a really really plain workingman's restaurant run by these two Cockneys. You could get a hamburger, a piece of pie, and coffee for a dollar." A door or two away was Bud's Club 77, a deadfall that shook many a nickel out of the pockets of American Greetings' less sober minions. Across the way, where the Clifton Road streetcars once angled out of Detroit and rumbled down towards Edgewater Park, was a curving 1900-era business building housing a small beauty parlor, a Fisher's market, and, most important to comics history, Ziggy's Barber Shop.

I remember Ziggy because he gave me what I believe was my first store haircut, lifting me up to sit on a plank he laid across the steel arms of the Koken barber chair. He was short, balding, with a black mustache and an eager-to-please Mitteleuropa manner, and in 1963 he was still manning the clippers and Wildroot after nearly 20 years. Hi Brow people would come back and crack jokes about Ziggy, imitating his accent, much to the amusement of Tom Wilson.

Hi Brows' chief, says Robert, was "the ideal person to be mediator between the business executives and the artists—kinda protected the artists from these rapacious venal characters. . . He could smooth things over with those guys. He knew how to stroke those assholes. He produced results: the work was good, and it sold."

Originally from Kentucky, Wilson had put in his drudge-time as an artist, but was made department head when the Hi Brow line was established around the late '50s. "Wilson kinda picked up ideas from other people. . . He got this Ziggy thing and at the same time I had the toad character I always drew saying 'Tis sad.' John Gibbons did this thing called *The Sad Book*. . . Wilson used a lot of these elements and also this real simple art style he had. . . He first started to work on that 'Ziggy' thing when I was still there in '66, but it didn't really click till after I left."

Ziggy, as a shapeless mass of walking

woe, became in the 1970s a runaway favorite of the comics page, Sunday section, reprint books, and, of course, greeting cards—by American Greetings, naturally—making Wilson (along with R. Crumb) another local success legend.

In Hi Brows, for the first time in his life, Robert was accepted on his own merits and personality among equals. “I was the lad of the group. They’d treat me as the up-and-coming young kid. They were all considerably older than me.” Walter Lee, a short ruddy Englishman with a curly beard, lived near our apartment on Carnegie. He’d gone to art school in Liverpool with John Lennon, and had a drawing style that was “perfect for those Hi Brow cards: real simple and innocent, little cute nebbish characters. It had this funny whimsical quality.”

But the one who helped shape Robert’s own viewpoint, he believes, was writer John Gibbons. “He had this way of coping with life where he made a joke out of everything—kept me cracked up all the time. He was genuinely hilarious, but underneath there was a lot of bitterness and paranoia about people. I kinda copied his style. It’s a defense against the world: humor was a way to slide through. But it kind of broke down when there was a serious crisis to deal with. When things got heavy, it didn’t work, and Gibbons would get real nervous.”

Gibbons, who left American Greetings for Hollywood scriptwriting in the 1970s, was an idea man who sparked everybody else, says Robert. “He was definitely the main source of humor in that whole place. He influenced me in some instinctive way that I can’t pinpoint.

John Gibbons died of cancer in Los Angeles in 1987, according to Robert. “Walter Lee and his wife Catherine were holding his hand when he died.”

“Roberta Smith, Office Girl” was a by-product of Robert’s tenure in the Hi Brow Department. It was drawn for the employee news bulletin and was intended—by the personnel department, at least—to plug such perennial concerns as safety, job security, etc. But, predictably, in Robert’s hands “Roberta” rapidly developed into something just over the edge of Company Image. Though Robert swears he did his best to rein himself in, and the artwork (done in the #0 Rapidograph pen that he now carried in his shirt pocket at all times) was constantly improving, the powers-that-were became increasingly uncomfortable with the content. One particular act of what he considered petty censorship was too much, and this rare Crumb venture into the traditional “daily strip” format was terminated.

Observing his fellow toilers in the jingle

vineyard, Robert was led to an activity he found to be little encouraged by his employer: questioning. “I used to ask myself, ‘Is this it? Is this what the rest of your life is?’ ’Cause most of those people were a lot older than I was, and that was their life: sit around that stupid goddam greeting-card company. It was the focal point of their lives. A lot of them had other art things they were trying to do on the side, and they never quite got it together.” Would this happen to Robert, too? It had been a year since he’d fled the comfortable, if somewhat rancid, family nest. A lot had happened, some better along with plenty of bitter—but was this really what he wanted? Was there something more?

There seemed to be little point in pursuing a future in comic books. That field



was still languishing in the slough of television and Comics Code censorship; the so-called “silver age,” far away in New York City, was barely on the horizon, and it wouldn’t have had much to offer Robert anyhow. “I’d gotten away from reading comics at that time. There was nothing in the way of new comics... I was kinda broadening my cultural perspectives during that period.” Besides scouring Cleveland’s Salvation Army and Goodwill thrift stores for old 78 records, Robert and I hit second-hand bookshops, dusty record bins and half-forgotten out-of-the-way businesses of every description in back streets and slum areas, looking for early magazines, advertisements, posters, 1920s packages and boxes and bottles, labels, illustrations, furniture, fashions, and examples of architecture and industrial design. Our special favorites were in a 1925-1940 style we called (for want of a more definitive word) “moderne”—curved parallel lines, zigzag trim, glass bricks: considered very klunky and out-of-it at the time, but we loved it. We tried to furnish our next apartment in “early Depression,” little knowing that ten years later this style would be rechristened and venerated as “art deco.”

A new apartment was a necessity: with summer, the rats at our Carnegie Avenue

building were becoming terrifyingly bold. Hundreds of tiny scampering feet over our heads would keep us awake nights, as they apparently used the enclosed ceiling pipechaise as a freeway. “They used to congregate by the incinerator down there,” Robert recalls. “If somebody lit the incinerator, they would run out the hole in the front of it. So one time we decided to block up the hole and light the fire. You could hear the rats screaming. It was very satisfying.” Somewhat more sporting was our occasional habit of pot-shotting the buggers with unwanted 78 records, thrown discus-fashion. This disposed of both vermin and useless Joseph C. Smith and Yerkes Jazzarimba sides.

Eventually we took over the entire third floor of a large frame rooming house on East 115th Street, whose back windows overlooked Hessler Road. Building and inhabitants were straight out of a “Ghastly” Ingels EC comic. We rented it from a doddering solitary alcoholic who seldom moved from his fragrant corner in the basement. Everyone else in the building was at least as ancient. “I remember coming home from work one day and this old brother and sister who lived on the first floor—they used to fight all the time—the old woman was standing at the door of their apartment, which was right off the hallway in the front. Says, ‘I knew it. I knew I’d outlive him.’ She had this gleeful expression on her face. I looked past her and saw the old guy was obviously dead, slumped over in a chair in the front room.”

But the place was clean, cheap, convenient (half a block from Euclid), and, best of all, blessedly free of creepy crawling things (our fellow-tenants aside). The dormer windows, and sloping ceilings that came down almost to the floor, fit perfectly with my prized overstuffed chair (see Robert’s sketch of Barb Brock), our prewar radio (no TV), and other artifacts. Soon there was a new addition, hauled up the creaking staircase by four strapping, sweating giants: a Volunteers of America piano, painted flat white, which Robert and his Hi Brow cronies proceeded to decorate in rainbow hues at a painting party a few nights later. Even more remarkable, he began to play it, taking weekly lessons at a nearby settlement house.

Gradually the parameters of Robert’s world were expanding. Adele’s bar, around the corner on Euclid, was an off-campus watering hole and a hangout for intellectuals, a theatrical and musical crowd, and the gay contingent. I became something of a regular and wheedled Robert (although a teetotaler) to spend an occasional evening in its friendly confines. Usually, though, he preferred to hang out a block up Euclid at Dean’s Diner, a hardy



Depression-era survivor with a big sign reading "The Finest People on Earth Eat at This Diner."

Robert's closest encounter with the campus, however, was at Ohio State University in Columbus. One of the most populous in the country, this institution dominates the entire North Side of Ohio's capital city. Barb was a sophomore there in 1963-64 and Robert and I made a bus trip down to hang out with her and her friends for an extended weekend; later, he paid a return visit alone.

"Columbus was this giant college scene," Robert remembers. "Everybody just seemed lost in this mass of students." Barb's crowd, who hung out at Charbert's on North High Street, "seemed goofy and undirected to me—just putzing around." There wasn't much dope apparent, yet, but there was plenty of drinking and free sex. That was catnip to Robert, who was still a virgin and mightily tired of that condition.

Then came "*L'Affaire Big Barb*."

Big Barb was a friend of Brock. "She was this big creature, sort of attractive but really *big*—kinda like a scapegoat in this crowd she hung out with. They were always making fun of her, and she had this way of behaving—leaving herself open for being made fun of all the time. . . . She was real hot to trot and make out—got real hot and excited and say, 'Do it! Do it!'"

"I was just too shy. It took me a long time to get past that shyness. Finally this one night she got really pissed off at me—'cause I wouldn't stick it in her, I guess. All these other people were sleeping on the floor of her apartment. She got out of the bed and sat down on the floor next to this other guy she was attracted to. So I just got up, got dressed, and left."

"Then she said, 'No! Don't leave!' I said, 'Just forget it.' Walked out of there. Left Columbus and never came back."

Another typically '60s life crisis now loomed: Robert's letter from his draft board notifying him to report for his Army physical exam. The idea of his scrawny form in khakis, wielding a bayonet against our nation's potential invaders and blood

enemies in Santo Domingo (this was before Viet Nam), seemed pretty far-fetched. Still, you never knew. . .

Robert remembers a roomful of "guys all giggling and cutting up. They told me to strip down and get in line. You're standing there in your shoes and socks and your underpants. Your valuables are in a pouch that they put around your neck on a string. They pulled me right out of line right away. At that point I was in a complete state of terror, and horrified: 'Oh my God! This is it!'"

"This guy came up and said, 'Go see that guy at Desk #7.' I went down there and the guy thumped me on the chest, wrote something down: 'That's 4-F. That's a "pectoral excavation."'"

"When I think about that whole decade of the '60s," Robert laughs, "where I started to where I ended up, it's an amazing saga." One chance turn at this point, one casual decision—to go into commercial comic books, for example, or to turn his back on comics completely—and Robert might have altered his future totally. Picture R. Crumb as Frank Frazetta or Neal Adams or Pablo Picasso instead of "Mister 1960s"!

One afternoon around this time the two of us were sitting in the livingroom on 115th under some framed color covers of the old *Life* humor magazine from the 1920s—Held's definitive depiction of the flappers, shieks, and raccoon-coated bathtub-gin era. "Maybe," I kidded, "you'll be the next one of these 'cartoonists of an era.' Maybe you'll be the John Held Jr. of the 1960s."

I'm not always a good prophet, but I was on the money that time!



Still, I couldn't have predicted what was to happen to our battered, beloved city of Cleveland over the next decade—and wouldn't have wanted to face it if I had. In a few years would come the Hough race riots, civil violence, fires, bulldozers, and urban "renewal"—the relentless destroying, shattering, chipping away, bludgeoning down of the buildings, stores, streets, and artifacts we loved: the things that made Cleveland (and in fact every American city) infinitely varied and infinitely fascinating. The early 1960s was about the last time, I now realize, that you could sample this, actually live in the middle of it, and enjoy it before it self-destructed.

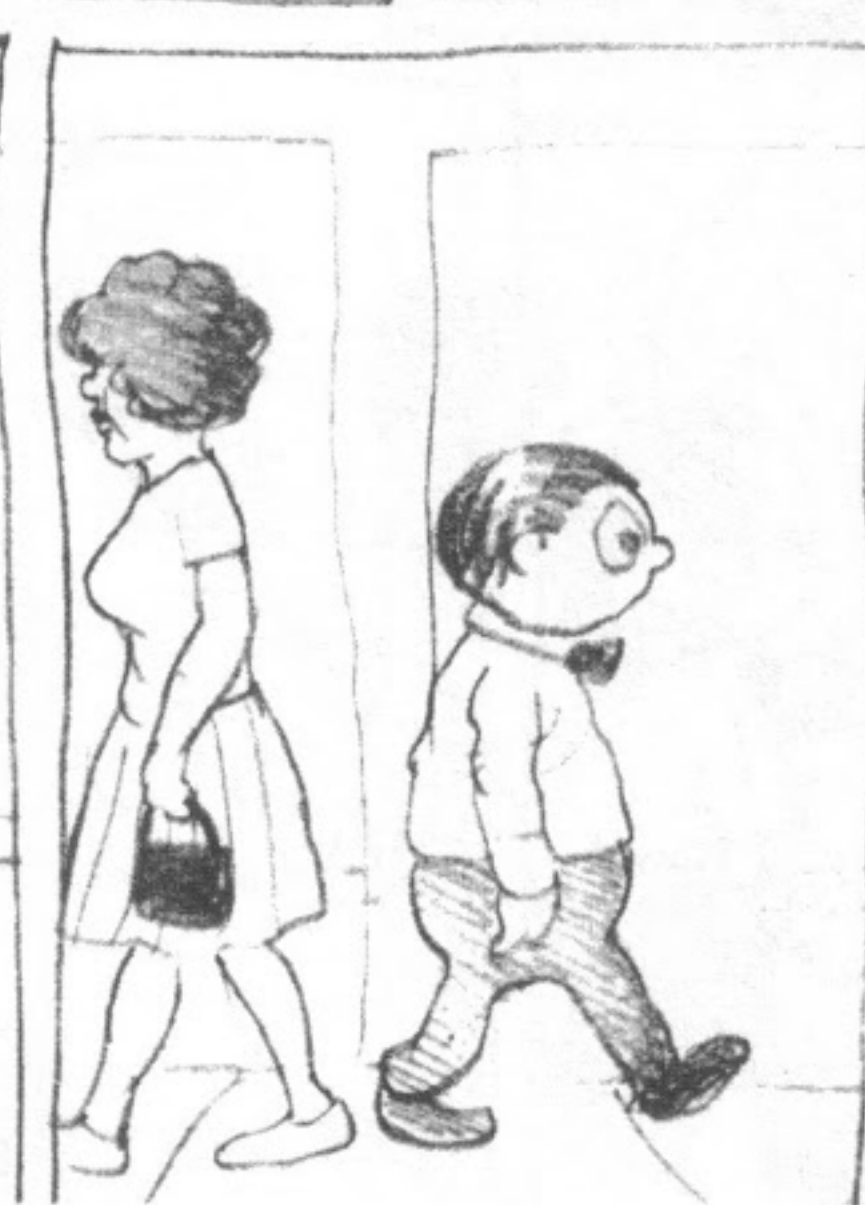
Today, our old neighborhood around East 105th and Euclid has been utterly and totally removed—every building, every brick, as if all the structures had been made out of Lego blocks and a giant hand had come down out of the clouds and swept them away like they'd never been. I left Cleveland in 1965, but in 1976 I found myself on a Greyhound bus at six a.m. roaring down Euclid and past 105. From Cleveland Clinic to the Howard Johnson motel, the area looked like Ground Zero at Hiroshima. Every block had been cleared of human construction and human activity and human life, the basements filled in level to the pavement.

Gone were the shoeshine stands, the gin mills, the rib shacks and barbeque pits. Gone were the holdovers of a more elegant era in the '20s: the Alhambra's shell, the elaborate plate glass and terra cotta storefronts (pocked with missing tiles and graffiti), the couple of remaining sad little Jewish restaurants. Gone was La Cave and Rebel's and the bus station and the procession of hookers on the south side of Euclid. Only the naked streets remained, the asphalt, and the traffic.

But—wait a minute. There is *one* artifact that I'd be willing to bet is still there, still in place where Robert left it in 1963. Still on the south side of Euclid, but out a couple of blocks, between Adelbert Road and East Boulevard. It seems they were putting in a new sidewalk one day as we were passing by. Robert was going through his compulsive toad-drawing period then. Little Oggies sprouted up in his wake wherever he passed: in his notebooks, on tablecloths, on walls, in dirt on trucks and windows. A little toad saying "'Tis sad."

Faced with that expanse of fresh, wet concrete, what else was he to do? He dipped in his left forefinger and, as far as I know, that little Oggie is still there, immortalized in concrete, stepped on by millions over the passing years, but still spouting his melancholy message to the shuffling feet of Clevelanders.

As the toad said, "'Tis sad."



LITTLE BILLY BEAN

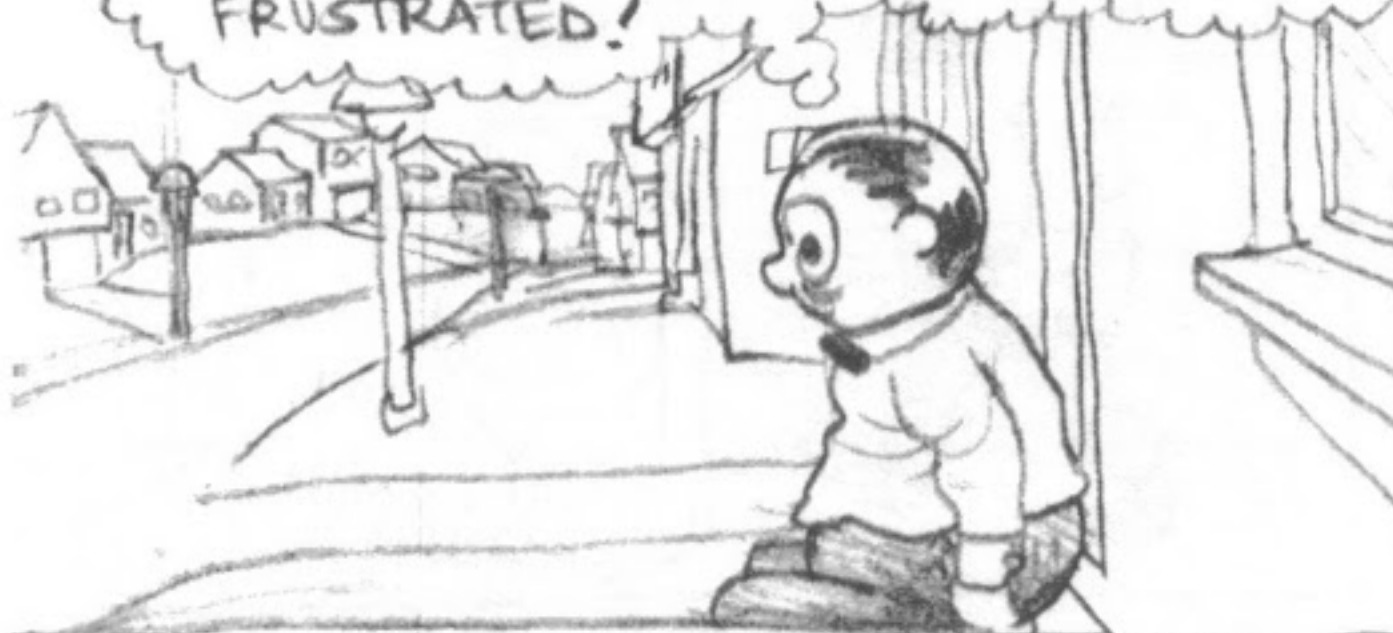
AM ME! WHAT A HELL OF AN ENVIRONMENT TO BE BORN IN! IT'S NO WONDER I'M UNHAPPY, IN SUCH A STERILE, IMPOTENT PLACE LIKE THIS!



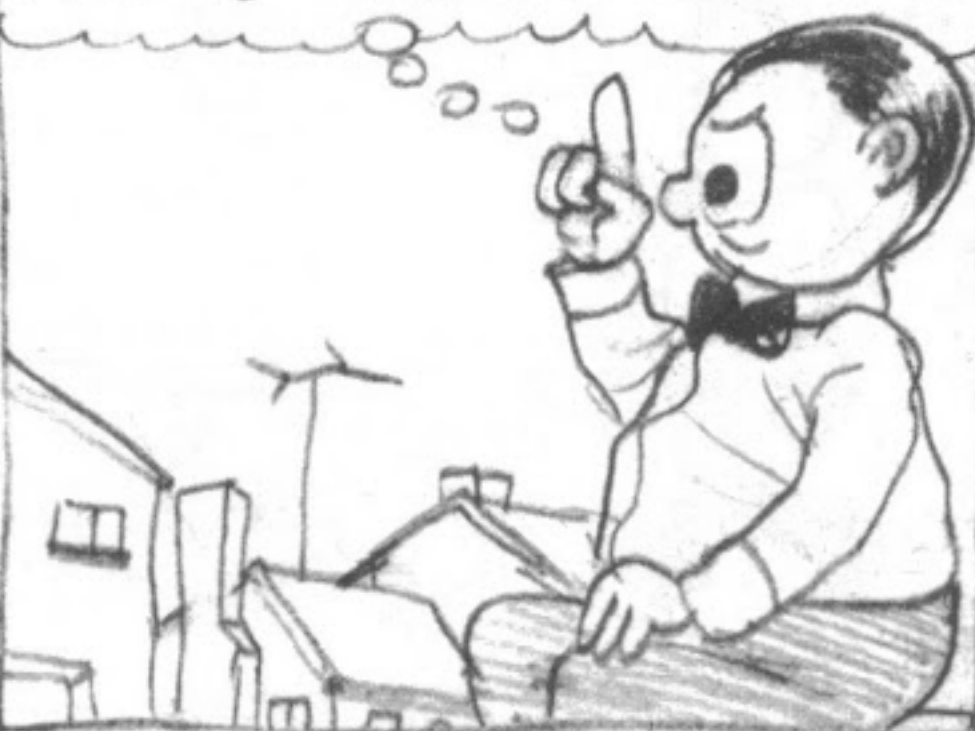
THESE SURROUNDINGS ARE SO DREARY, SO LIFELESS... EVERYTHING IS SO STIFF AND CONVENTIONAL LOOKING... SO MONOTONOUS... IT'S ENOUGH TO DEPRESS ANY SENSITIVE SOUL...



I FEEL AS IF I'M CUT OFF FROM THE MAIN STREAM OF LIFE... ISOLATED FROM REAL ACTIVITY, FROM ARTISTIC AND INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY... THIS PLACE OFFERS NONE OF THESE THINGS... THIS PLACE IS DESOLATE, A VAST MENTAL WASTELAND... NO WONDER I'M FRUSTRATED!



I'LL NEVER START LIVING UNTIL I GO WHERE THERE'S CULTURE AND INTELLIGENCE! I WON'T BE HAPPY AS LONG AS I REMAIN IN THIS LIFELESS, STERILE ENVIRONMENT! THIS IS THE ROOT OF MY FRUSTRATION!





FUN
WITH
JIM
AND
MABEL
BY
CRUMBS
MAY 8, 1962



ALRIGHT YOU LITTLE
BASTARD! C'MERE!

QUIT CALLIN' ME A BASTARD,
MABEL...! IF MIZ POLLY
TOLD YA ONCE SHE TOLD YA
A HUNDRED TIMES NOT T'
CUSS... BUT DON'T WORRY!
MABEL... I WON'T TELL
'ER... I WON'T PEACH ON
YA... I AIN'T NO TATTLE-
TALE, MABEL... I'LL ADMIT
I GOT A LOT OF FAULTS...
BUT IF THERE'S ONE
THING I AIN'T, IT'S A
TATTLE-TALE... I'VE LIVED
ON THIS EARTH FER ALMOST
TWELVE YEARS AN' NEVER
ONCE DURING THAT TIME HAVE
I PEACHED ON ANYBODY...
HONEST... IT'S TH' TRUTH
MABEL... I AIN'T LYIN' TA
YA... N' I TELL TH' TRUTH
MOST OF TH' TIME...
ONCE IN A WHILE I TELL
A LIE BUT MOST OF THE
TIME I TELL TH' TRUTH...

I SEEN
WHO DONE IT
MABEL... BUT

I CAN'T TELL YA CAUSE THAT'D BE
PEACHIN' AND I DON'T PEACH...

GOSH... HOW
NOBLE OF
YOU!
DAMN
STUPID
LITTLE...

LOOK! YOU TH' ONE THAT
DID THAT? WELL, ARE YA?
C'MON! C'MON! ADMIT IT!

I DIDN'T DO IT, MABEL.
I DIDN'T SPILL
YER PERFUME ON
TH' FLOOR... I SWEAR
T' GOD I DIDN'T
MABEL...

YOU AIN'T A VERY CONVINCING
LIAR, JIMMEREND... LOOK, I
WON'T CUT YER HEAD OFF 'FOR
DOIN' IT... I JIS' WANTCHA T'BE
HONEST WITH ME... Y' SEE, KID? ONE
THING I HATE IS A LIAR, Y' SEE?

BUT MABEL... I
AIN'T LYIN'... I
DIDN'T DO IT...
HEY MABEL... MIZ
POLLY BOUGHT ME A
BRAND NEW BAG OF
MARBLES T'DAY... LET'S
GO OUT IN TH' BACK-
YARD N' PLAY WITH
'EM... I'LL GO IN MY
ROOM N' GIT 'EM...
I GOT THOUSANDS OF
MARBLES MABEL... I'VE BEEN
SAVIN' 'EM FER YEARS...

THEY HAD A BIG MARBLE-CONTEST
HERE IN TOWN LAST SUMMER MABEL...
AND I ENTERED IT N' CAME IN
FOURTH PLACE...

REALLY? GOD! I
ALMOST CARE!
LISTEN, Y'
LITTLE JERK!
WIIYA
PLEASE?

I GOT A BIG DATE TONIGHT WITH
A FELLA... WE'RE GOIN' OUT TO A
CLUB... YOU KNOW... NIGHT CLUB...
I GOTTA HAVE PERFUME... THAT WAS TH'
ONLY BOTTLE I HAD... AN' I AIN'T GOT
ENOUGH MONEY TA BUY ANYMORE... SEE?

GEE... THAT'S
TOO BAD, MABEL...
LOOKS LIKE YOU'LL
HAVE T' STAY HOME
T'NIGHT... BEIN' AS
YER STAYIN' HOME COME
NIGHTTIME WE KIN HAVE
TH' WEINER ROAST IN
THE BACK YARD... MISS
POLLY'S GOT PLENTY OF
WEINERS IN TH' ICE BOX...
AND I KNOW HOW T'
BUILD A CAMPFIRE...
I LEARNED HOW WHEN I
WAS A
CUBSCOUT...

CONTINUED...



SO BEIN' AS IT'S YOUR FAULT I AIN'T GOT ANY PERFUME, YOU GOTTA HELP ME GET SOME MORE... Y' GOT ANY MONEY IN YER PIGGY BANK?

BUT MABEL... I... UH... I...



OH! THAT'S RIGHT... I BORROWED ALL YER MONEY YESTERDAY, DIDN'T I? HMM... WONDER IF MISS POLLY WOULD... GOD NO! WOULDN'T USE ANY O' HER STUPID PERFUME EITHER!



TELL Y' WHAT KID... WE'LL HAFTA PULL A JOB... YA GET ME? WE'LL HAFTA LIFT IT!

I DUNNO, MABEL... IT'S A SIN... TA STEAL... IT SAYS SO IN TH' BIBLE

HEY, MABEL... I GOT SOMETHIN' IMPORTANT T' TELL YA... I BEEN WANTIN' TA TELL YA ALL DAY BUT I HAVEN'T HAD A CHANCE TILL NOW... IT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT MABEL... IT WAS ABOUT SEVENTHirty... I HAD JUST BEEN OVER AT GREG JOHNSON'S HOUSE AND I WAS ON MY WAY HOME... I DECIDED T' TAKE A SHORT CUT THROUGH TH' WOODS... AND THAT'S WHEN I SAW IT... IT WAS A FLYIN' SAUCER... HONEST T' GOD, MABEL... I SAW A REAL GENUINE FLYIN' SAUCER... IT SWOOPED DOWN OUT OF THE SKY AND LANDED ONLY A FEW FEET IN FRONT OF ME... I AIN'T LYIN' TA YA, MABEL... IT'S TH' TRUTH!



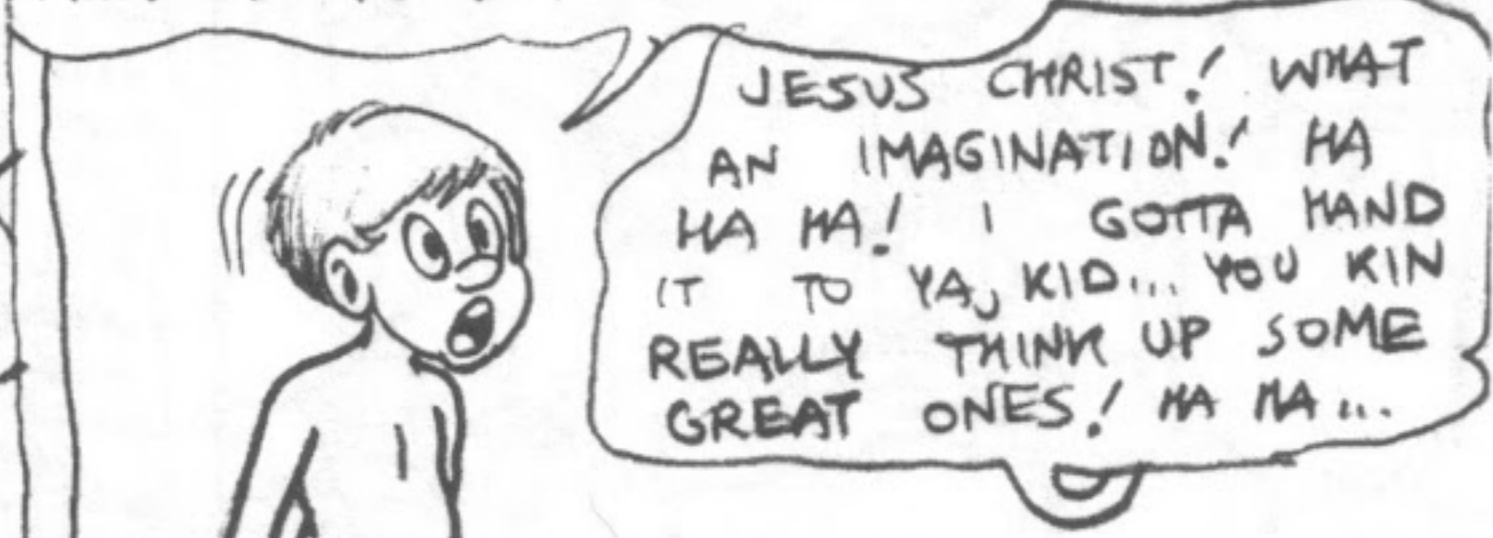
WHATSIS NOW? YOU SAW A FLYIN' SAUCER? SO, WHAT'S SO HOT ABOUT THAT KID? I SEE I'EM ALL TH' TIME!



A DOOR OPENED AND OUT STEPPED A BUNCH O' LOOKING GREEN-COLORED LITTLE MEN... THERE WERE ABOUT FIVE OF 'EM... THEY WERE ABOUT FIFTEEN OR SIXTEEN INCHES HIGH... THEIR HEADS WERE SHAPED LIKE CARROTS... SORT OF ROUND AT THE BOTTOM AND THEY CAME TO A POINT AT THE TOP... AND THEY EACH HAD ONE HUGE EYE IN THE MIDDLE OF THEIR HEADS... AND INSTEAD OF A MOUTH THEY HAD A BEAK... JUST LIKE A CHICKEN... AND THEY HAD LEGS AND FEET JUST LIKE A CHICKEN, TOO... AND THEY WORE CRAZY LITTLE HOLSTERS AND CARRIED CRAZY LITTLE GUNS IN 'EM...

SIGH...

I ASKED 'EM WHERE THEY WERE FROM... THE LEADER WALKED ON UP TO ME N' TOLD ME THAT THEY CAME ALL THE WAY FROM MARS... HE ASKED IF I WANTED TO GO TO MARS AND I SAID YES AND HE ASKED ME TO CLIMB ABOARD THE FLYING SAUCER AND SO I CLIMBED ON ABOARD OF HER AND WE TOOK OFF INTO OUTERSPACE... NOW FLYING SAUCERS TRAVEL MIGHTY FAST, MABEL... AND IT ONLY TOOK US A FEW MINUTES TO GET TO MARS.



JESUS CHRIST! WHAT AN IMAGINATION! HA HA HA! I GOTTA HAND IT TO YA, KID... YOU KIN REALLY THINK UP SOME GREAT ONES! HA HA...

WHEN WE ARRIVED I TOOK A TOUR OF ONE OF THEIR CITIES... ALL TH' BUILDINGS WERE MADE OUT OF GLASS... THE WALLS WERE MADE OUT OF GLASS... THE ROOFS AND FLOORS WERE MADE OUT OF GLASS... ALL TH' FURNITURE WAS MADE OUT OF GLASS, TOO... THE TABLES WERE MADE OUT OF GLASS... THE CHAIRS WERE MADE OUT OF GLASS... AFTER I TOWAED THE CITY THEY BROUGHT ME BACK HOME IN THE FLYING SAUCER...



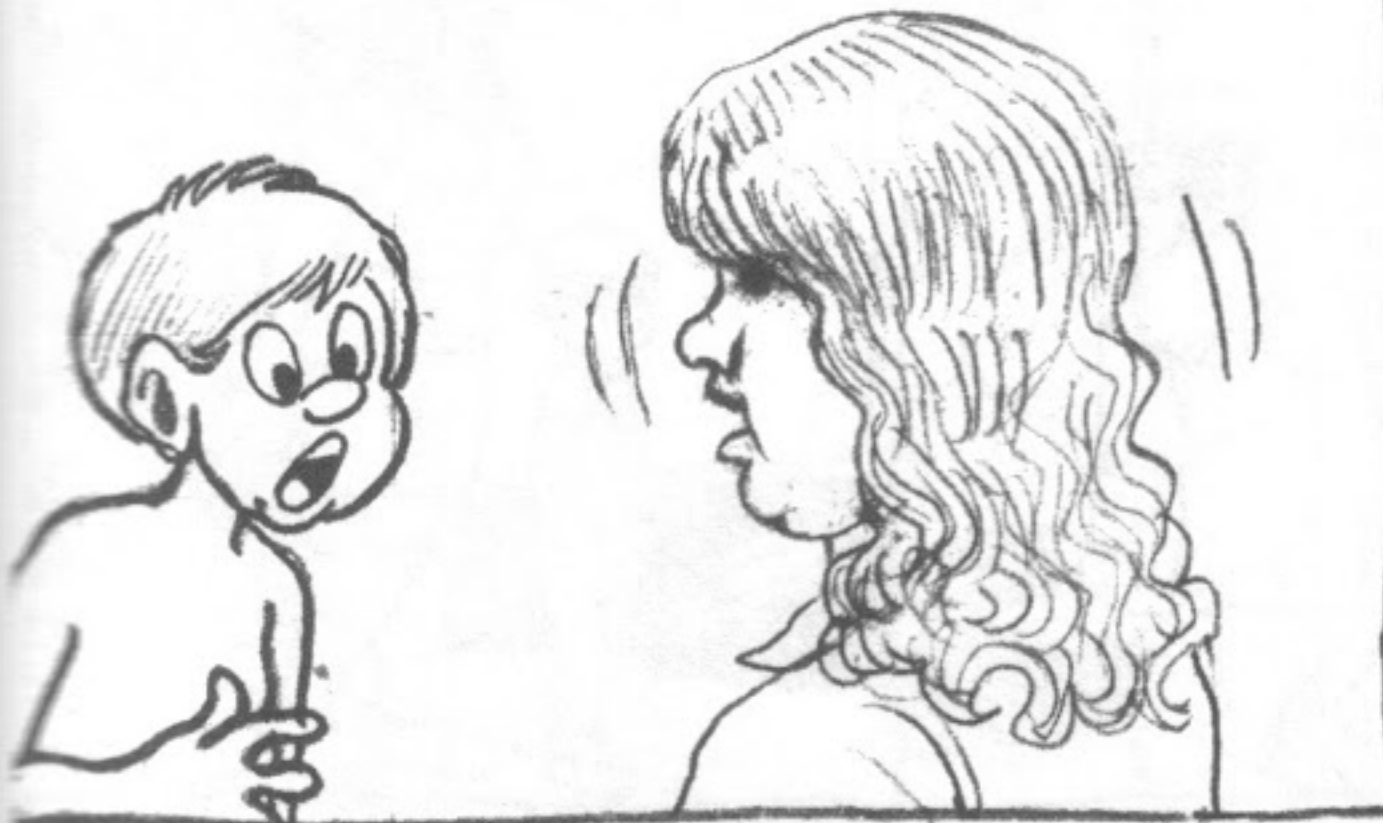
GOSH-AROOTIE!

BOY! YOU SURE ARE LUCKY, KID... GOIN' TO MARS AN' ALL! IT ISN'T EVERYBODY THAT HAS THAT CHANCE! GOSH, I ENVY YOU! WHAT DID THEY EAT, THESE PEOPLE... THESE MARTIANS? HUM? DID THEY TALK? COULD THEY SPEAK ENGLISH?

GOSH MABEL... I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D BELIEVE ME... I WAS ONLY KIDDING... I NEVER REALLY TRAVELED ALL TH' WAY T' MARS N' BACK IN A FLYIN' SAUCER... TH' WHOLE THING WAS NOTHIN' BUT A LIE... THERE WASN'T AN OUNCE OF TRUTH IN IT... I HONESTLY DIDN'T THINK YOU'D FALL FOR IT, MABEL... I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU'D HAVE MORE SENSE THEN T' BELIEVE SELH A FANTASTIC STORY...



GOSH... YEA AWFULLY STUPID, MABEL!



AH, Y' LITTLE WISE-ACRE... I KNEW Y' WERE LYIN'... LITTLE BOOB! DON'T CALL ME STUPID! I DON'T HAFTA TAKE THAT KINDA GUFF FROM SOME LITTLE KID!

WHAT'RE YA DOIN' MABEL...? HE-EY!

HELP... LEMME GO... LEMME ALONE!



CALL ME STUPID, HUM? I'LL TEACH YA! HA! I'LL SHOW YA! YA LITTLE BASTARD!

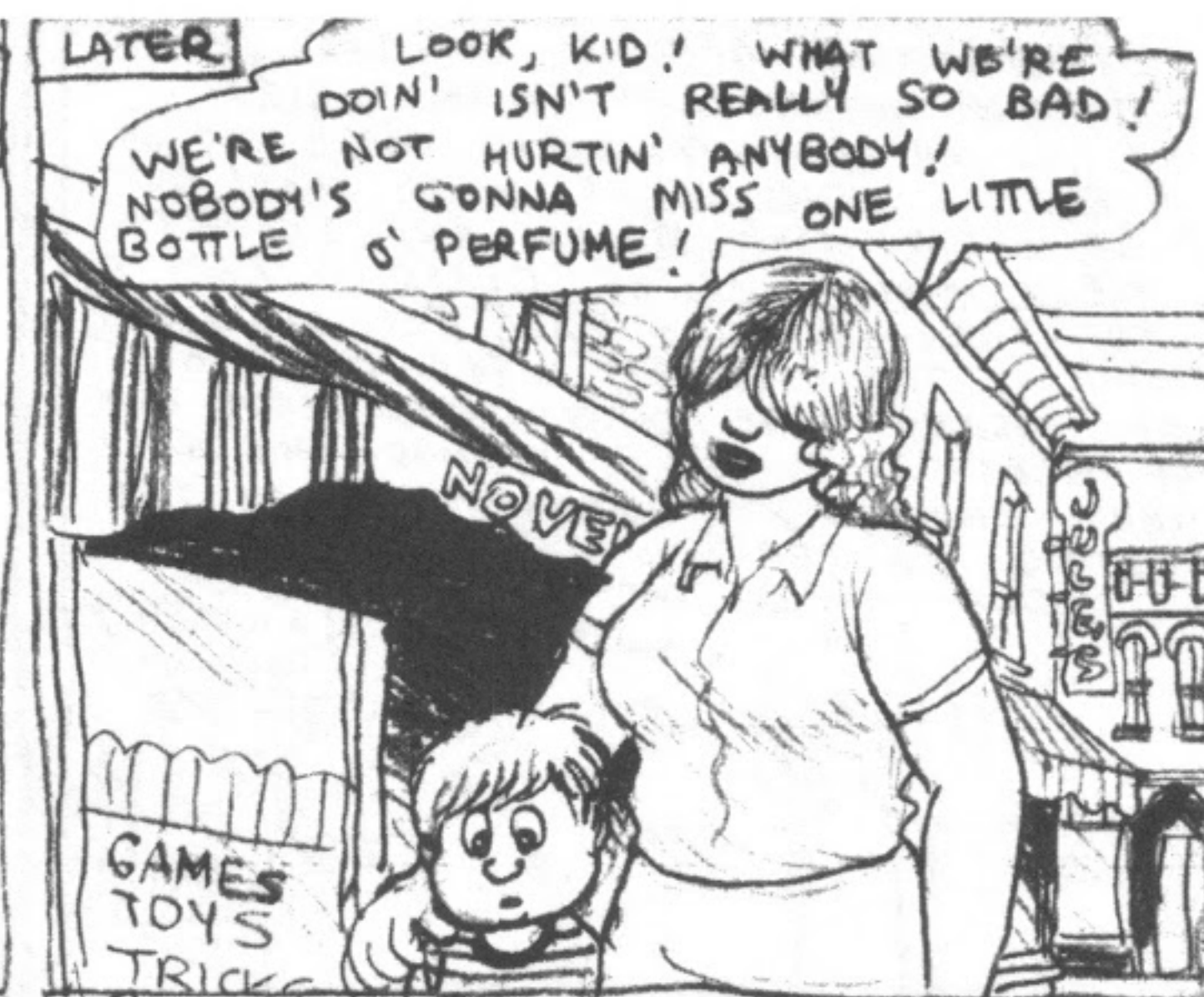
LEMME GO... PUT ME DOWN, MABEL - YOU BETTER LEAVE ME Y... ALONE... OR... I... I... I'LL TELL MISS POLLY



TAKE IT BACK, KID! C'MON, SAY YER SORRY! HA HA! C'MON! TELL ME YOU'LL NEVER BE SMART-ALECKY AGAIN! HA HA!

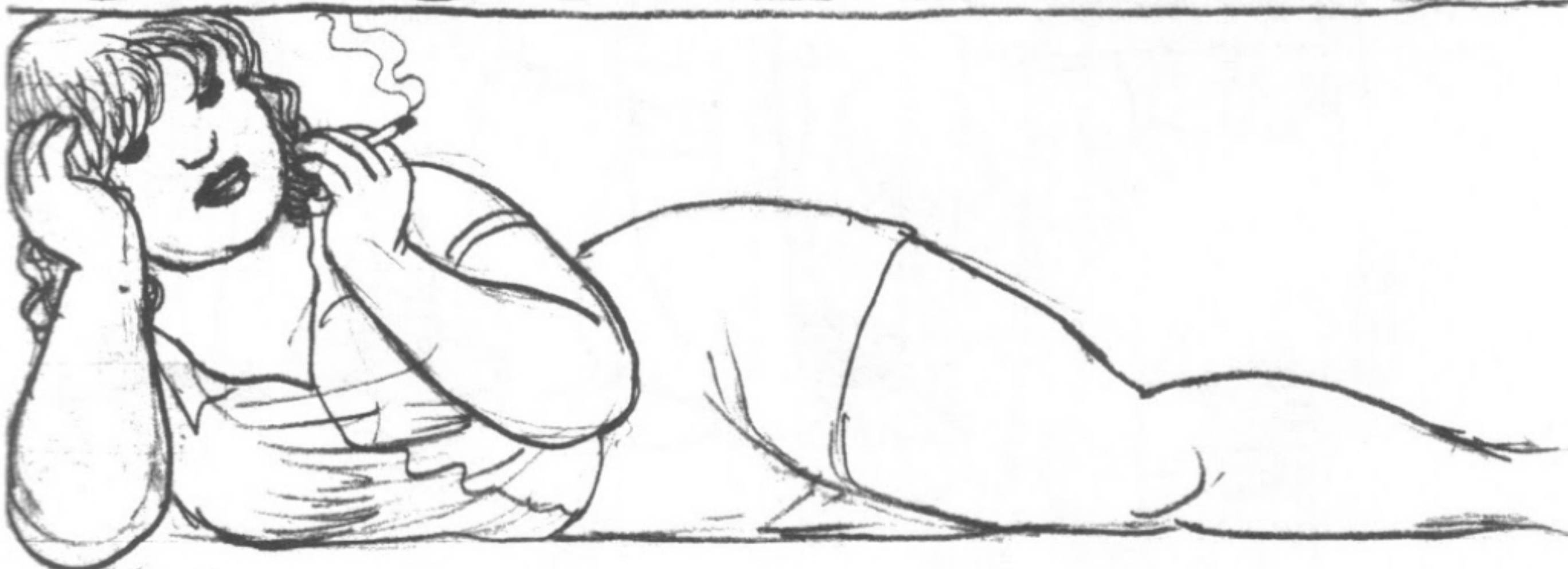
I'M SORRY MABEL... HONEST I AM... I'LL NEVER DO IT AGAIN... I'LL MAKE UP T' YA I'LL HELP YA STEAL THAT PERFUME SO YA KIN GO OUT T'NIGHT WITH THAT FELLA... I REALLY WILL







DISCONTINUED





YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT I
FIND SO AMUSING, SWEETHEART?
WELL, I'LL TELL YOU.... IT'S THAT
PAINTING THAT MISS MULLIGAN JUST
FINISHED..... IT'S DEPLORABLE! IT'S SO
AWFUL IT'S FUNNY.....



AH, SHUT CHER
BIG MOUTH,
'LIZ'BETH!

LET'S FACE IT, JIM.... MISS
MULLIGAN HAS NO TALENT FOR
PAINTING! SHE'S WASTING HER
TIME.... THERE'S ONLY ONE THING
MISS MULLIGAN HAS TALENT FOR...
IT'S... WELL.... EVERYBODY
KNOWS WHAT IT IS SO THERE'S
NO USE IN MY SAYING IT....



HEY MABEL!

'LIZ'BETH SAID YER PAINTING
WAS AWFUL! WHY DON'TCHA
BEAT 'ER UP FOR SAYIN' THAT,
MABEL!?



I DON'T GIVE A GODDAMN WHAT
SHE THINKS... SHE AIN'T NO EXPERT!!
I DON'T NEED HER TA TELL ME I'M
A LOUSY ARTIST... I KNEW THAT A LONG
TIME AGO... HEE HEE...



NO YOUR NOT, MABEL! IT'S
A REAL GOOD PICTURE, MABEL!
IT LOOKS JES' LIKE ME!



UH, YEH!
THANKS, KID!

TELL YER LITTLE JEW FRIEND IF SHE
DOESNT LIKE MY PAINTING SHE CAN
GO T' HELL!



OKAY, MABEL!



FRITZ the CAT

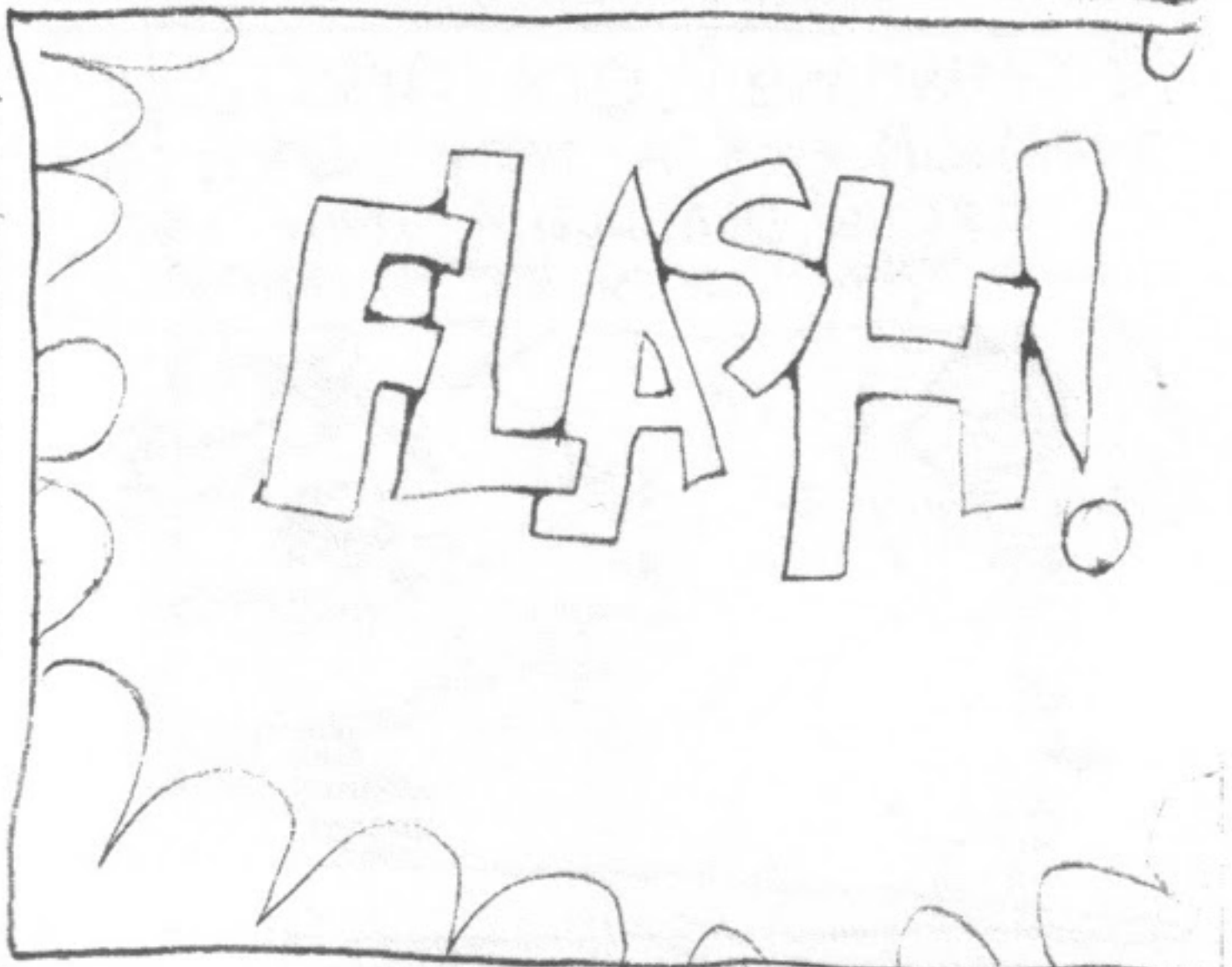
IN OUR LAST EXCITING, SUSPENSEFUL EPISODE WE LEFT FRITZ STANDING ON THE THRESH-HOLD OF HIS MEETING WITH THE GREAT SINGER AND FAMOUS ENTERTAINMENT PERSONALITY MISS DELLA PUSSY-WILLOW. HE HAS MANAGED, THROUGH THE WITS OF HIS FRIEND, FUZZY THE BUNNY, TO GET INTO THE BACK-STAGE ENTRANCE!



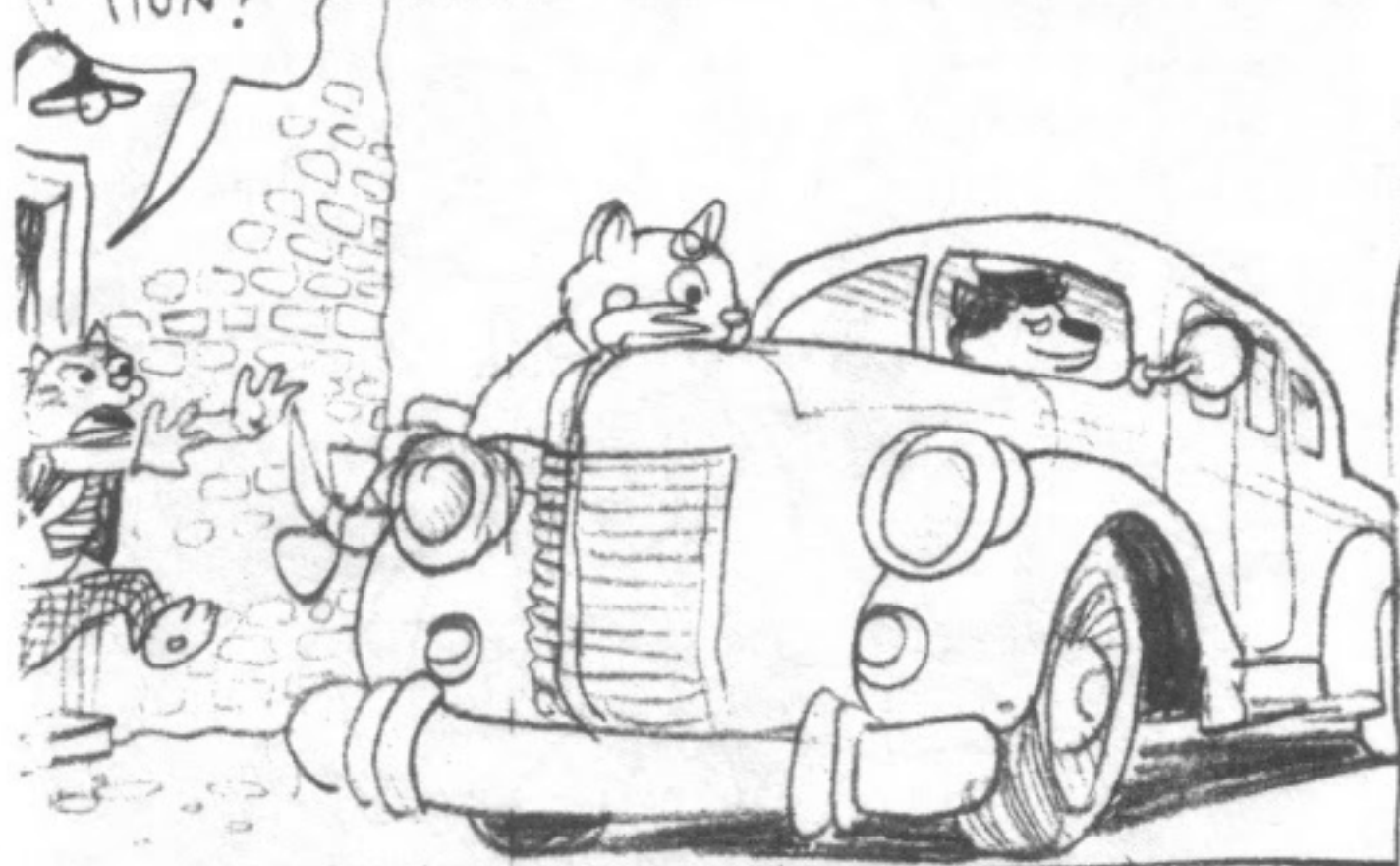








DOES NOT MY ALL-CONSUMING PASSION MEAN
ANYTHING TO YOU? I CAN'T GO ON WITHOUT
YOU! ...I'LL...I'LL DIE OF A BROKEN-HEART!
ONLY YOU CAN SAVE ME FROM UTTER DESOLA-
TION!



YOU CAN'T! YOU...JUST.. CAN'T...
SO... THIS... TO ...

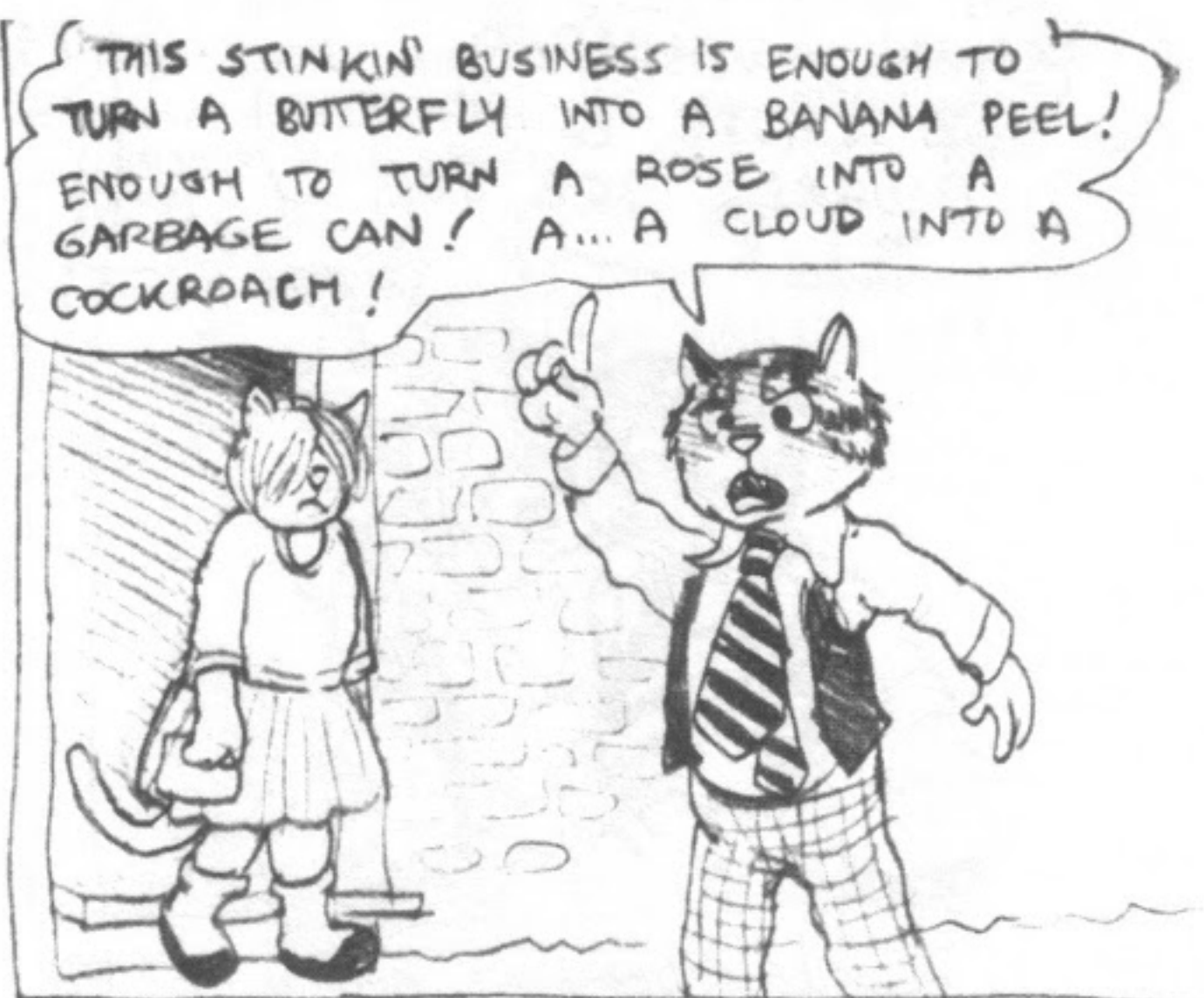


...SIGH...



DAMN COLD-HEARTED, EGOTISTICAL,
SNOOTY-NOSED, ARTIFICIAL, PHONY DAME!





BAWL WHIMPER
SOB CHOKER BLUBBER
BLUBBER SOB SOB



SNIFF... M-MY NAME IS GABRIELLE... WHAT'S YOUR'S?

TERD...



YOU MUST GIVE UP THIS QUEST FOR FAME, GABRIELLE. YOU MUST CAST IT AWAY AND FORGET IT..

I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, MISTER TERD...



ACTUALLY GABRIELLE... MY NAME IS FRITZ...

OH...



I S'POSE I'LL JUST BE A NOBODY ALL MY LIFE... JUST A BIG ZERO!

NO NO NO!



LISTEN, CHILD! I ONCE WANTED FAME... I ONCE DESIRED IT PASSION-ATELY! I WANTED TO GO DOWN IN HISTORY ALONG WITH ALL THE OTHER GREATS... I WANTED TO BE IMMORTAL AMONG THOSE WHO LIVE AFTER ME... I LONGED TO BECOME A NAME EVERY CREATURE WOULD KNOW... A HOUSEHOLD WORD...



BUT NOW I'M OLDER AND WISER. I SEE THE FUTILITY AND SUPERFICIALITY OF FAME. LOOK AT IT THIS WAY, DEAR FRESH AND INNOCENT BLOSSOM OF SPRING, WHO'S GONNA CARE IN SIXTY TRILLION YEARS?



THE ONLY THINGS WORTH LIVING FOR ARE LOVE AND BEAUTY, KID! IN LOVE YOU'LL GET ALL THE DEVOTION AND WORSHIP YOU NEED! FAME! TO REL WITH FAME!



YOU CAN LOOK AT IT THAT WAY

SOMEDAY, MY CHILD, WHEN YOU'RE OLD ENOUGH, LOVE WILL COME TO YOU AND YOU'LL SEE WHAT I MEAN!

SEE HERE, MR. FRITZ, I WISH YOU'D STOP CALLING ME A CHILD!



...AND I'M OLD ENOUGH TO LEARN ABOUT LOVE!

...BY GOLLY! YOU ARE AT THAT!



WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? TIME IS FLYING BY FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF LIGHT, DEAREST GABRIELLE...

HA HA HA...



KISS!



...LIFE IS SWEET!



THE END

fritz the cat

WHEN WE LAST SAW OUR PROTAGONIST HE WAS FLOATING AMONGST THE PINK CLOUDS OF SWEET NEW-BORN LOVE. THE BELOVED OBJECT: A FRESHLY-BLOSSOMED YOUNG KITTEN NAMED GABRIELLE







IT'S SAD ALRIGHT! YOU OUGHTA SEE THE LOUSY GRADES I GET! HEH HEH... WELL, COME ON! I'LL SHOW YA WHERE I LIVE 'N' YOU KIN MEET MY FOLKS...

I HOPE YOU DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. GRADES AN' ALL THAT CRAP, I MEAN...



OH, SOMETIMES! Y' CAN'T PASS UNLESS Y' GET GOOD MARKS, Y' KNOW... AN' I WANNA GET OUTA SCHOOL AS SOON AS I CAN!

YES INDEED! IT'S PRETTY UNBEARABLE, I KNOW!



I WENT T' SCHOOL FOR AWHILE... COULDN'T STAND IT, MYSELF! ALL THEY DO IS TRY TO CRAM YOUR HEAD FULL OF USELESS TRIPE... PHAH! WHO NEEDS IT, I TOLD 'EM!? THEY THREW ME OUT! HA HA... BIG OF THEM TO DO ME THAT FAVOR...

GOSH!



THIS IS MY HOUSE...

YE GODS! WHITE PICKET FENCE, RED SHUTTERS... THE WORKS!



YES, MY LOVE, ONE FINE DAY, WHILE THE SUN SHONE BRIGHTLY IN THE GREAT BLUE SKY OUTSIDE THE DINGY WINDOWS OF THE SCHOOLROOM, I FOUND MYSELF DROWNING, LOST IN A SEA OF MEANINGLESS NUMBERS AND LETTERS AND SIGNS AND POINTS AND ALL SUCH NONSENSE...



IN MY LAST BREATH BEFORE GOING DOWN IN THIS DISMAL OCEAN, I LOOKED OUT AT THE SUN AND THE SKY AND LEAPED... BY DAMN, I LEAPED RIGHT OUT OF THAT MISERABLE DESK, THREW DOWN MY PENCIL AND MY BOOK...



...AND RAN UP TO THE TEACHER, WHO WAS REALLING OFF ALOT OF FUTILE GIBBERISH AND PUTTING EVERYONE TO SLEEP,...I RAN UP TO THIS DREARY CREATURE, GRABBED HIM BY THE LABELS OF HIS COAT, AND, SHAKING HIM WITH ALL MY MIGHT, SCREAMED IN HIS FACE THAT IT WAS ALL FOR NOTHING...



...THAT LIFE IS SO PITIFULLY SHORT AND THE SUN IS SHINING AND THE SKY IS BLUE AND FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE LET'S DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT, AND IN A FURIOUS RAGE I THREW BOOKS AND PAPERS IN ALL DIRECTIONS AND PUSHED OVER A FEW DESKS AND THREW A WORLD GLOBE OUT THE WINDOW.



HI DAD...UH... FRITZ, THIS IS MY FATHER... DAD, I'D LIKE Y'TA MEET MY BOYFRIEND, FRITZ... UH...HELLO... OF COURSE, HOW ARE YA, FELLA... NICE T'MEET YOU...



GABRIELE, THEY DRAGGED ME UP BEFORE A BUNCH OF OLD FOSSILS CALLED THE "BOARD OF EDUCATION"...

...AND AFTER I TOLD THEM THAT THEY WERE NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF OLD SACKS OF EXCREMENT WHO DIDN'T HAVE AN IDEA WHAT A BUNCH OF ASSININE FOOLS THEY WERE, THEY DECIDED THAT MY EXPELLMENT WOULD BE MOST CONVENIENT FOR ALL CONCERNED... HAR HAR...



WELL, I WAS MORE THAN GLAD TO HEAR THEIR DECISION... I THREW THEM ALL SOME KISSES AS I LEFT... NEVER TO RETURN... HA HA... UH...AHEM...



WHAT IS IT, GABRIELLE, ANGEL, VIRGIN OF INNOCENCE, WONDER OF THE AGE, JOY TO THIS WEARY WORLD...? FRITZ, YOU SILLY THING, MY FATHER WANTS TO SHAKE HANDS WITH YOU!



WELL, DRAH, IF HE REALLY WANTS TO THAT BAD! ... ONLY IT'S THE MOST RIDICULOUS THING I'VE EVER HEARD OF!

FLUB!



LET'S FACE IT, IT'S BARBARIC, IT'S PRIMITIVE, IT BELONGS TO THE STONE AGES... IF YOU DO IT TO SHOW AFFECTION, I CAN CERTAINLY SUGGEST SEVERAL BETTER WAYS OF SHOWING IT! YOU COULD HUG, OR YOU COULD KISS... GOOD GOD! IF YOU FEEL WARMLY TOWARD ANOTHER SOUL, YOU MIGHT AS WELL SHOW IT IN SOME DECENT MANNER!



THIS SHAKING HANDS IS FOR THE BIRDS! FOR TWO TOTAL STRANGERS TO DO IT IS UTTERLY STUPID! UNLESS YOU HAPPEN TO BE A FANATICAL LOVER OF ALL THE CREATURES IN THE UNIVERSE. AND IN THAT CASE, LIKE I SAY, A HUG OR A KISS IS INFINITELY MORE ENJOYABLE..



BUT I'M SURE YOU DON'T LOVE ME! AND THERE'S NO DOUBT IN MY MIND ABOUT MY FEELINGS TOWARD YOU...

OH... FRITZ, THIS IS MY MOTHER..

OH... YOU'RE HOME GABRIELLE! AND THERE'S FRITZ!



AHH... HELLO! HELLO! YOU'RE NOT NEARLY AS PRETTY AS YOUR DAUGHTER, BUT YOU HAVE MY UNDYING GRATITUDE FOR PRODUCING THE DEAR GIRL!



SAY, SON, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH YOURSELF?

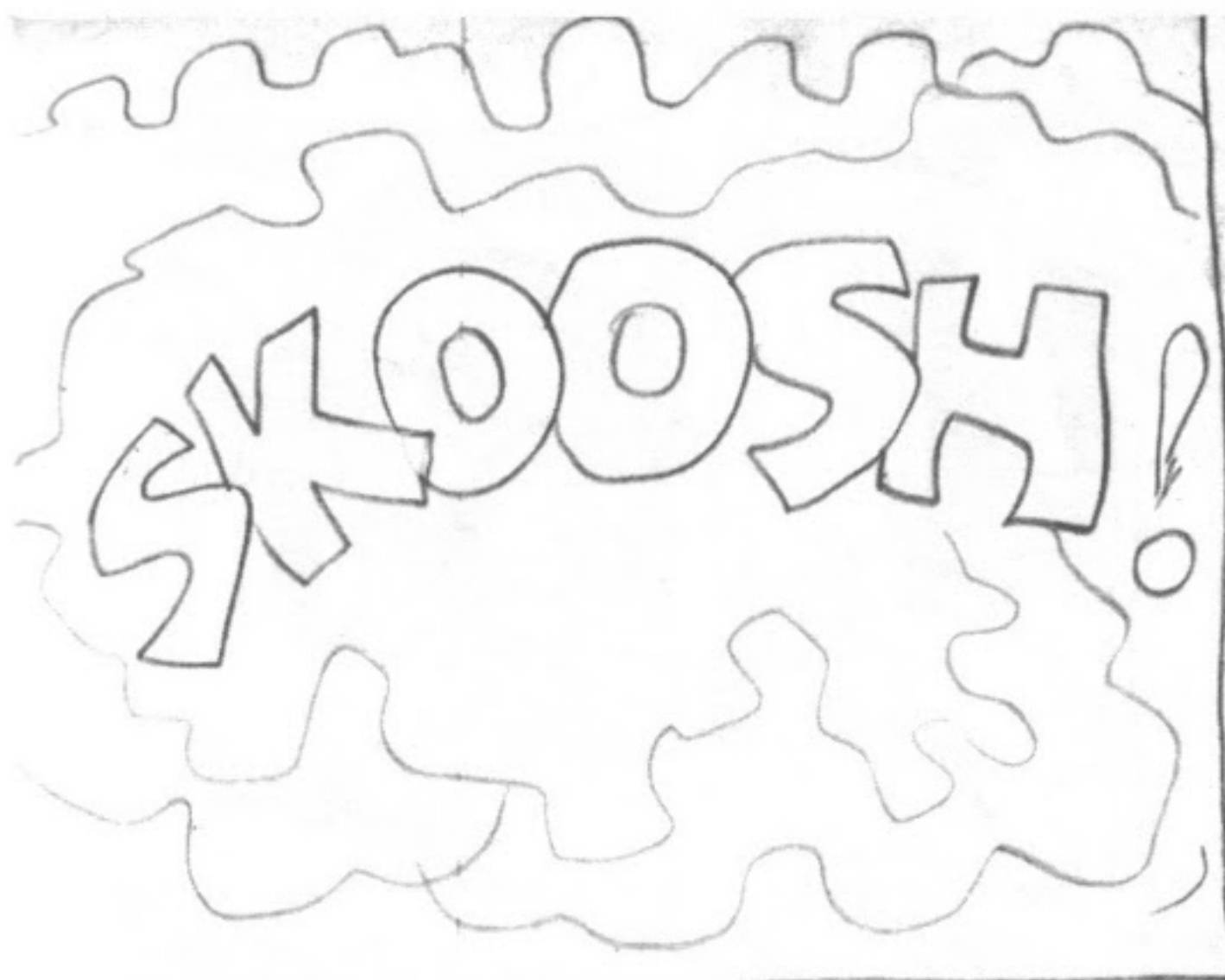
AS ANY FOOL CAN SEE, I'VE COMPLETELY GIVEN MYSELF OVER TO GABRIELLE! I'M HERS TO DO WITH WHAT EVER SHE PLEASES!













ARCADE

DECEMBER 1962

NUMBER TWENTY-NINE

Fritz the Cat by R. Crumb

IF YOU'LL REMEMBER THE LAST TIME WE SAW OUR HERO, KIDS, HE WAS ABOUT TO RESCUE THE BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GABRIELLE FROM THE CLUTCHES OF EVIL - LET'S LOOK IN ON THE STOUTHEARTED YOUTH AND SEE JUST WHAT BRILLIANT SCHEME HE IS WORKING ON TO SAVE THE SWEET MAIDEN! GOWDY GED, KIDS, THIS IS GOING TO BE A REAL THRILL-PACKED EPISODE, YOU BET! AND JUST WAIT TILL YOU SEE SOME OF THE SEX WE GOT!

REJOICE, MY LOVE! FOR I SHALL RETURN WITH THE KEY TO JOYS UNDREAMED OF!

OH FRITZ!



BUT FIRST, I MUST PACK MY MEAGRE BELONGINGS... THOSE FEW BASIC NECESSITIES THAT I KEEP STORED IN TH' OLD SUBWAY STATION... MY EVENING BUDS AND MY INDIAN BASK AND THE RIBBON FROM MY OWN DEAR DEAD MOTHER'S NECK AND MY OLD YEARBOOK FROM BARBER COLLEGE AND OTHER SUCH OBJECTS THAT I COULD NEVER DO WITHOUT!



AH! AND THEN GABRIELLE AND I SHALL BE OFF-FLYING AWAY IN THE WILD BLUE YONDER! ALSO THE YELLOW, RED, AND GREEN YONDER! HAPPY AND LOVING AND FREE AS THE WIND! AH! THE WONDERFUL THINGS I'LL SHOW THAT GIRL! HO HO! HER SWEET IGNORANT LITTLE MIND HAS NOT CONCEIVED OF THE GLORIES I HAVE IN STORE FOR HER!



I'LL DRAG HER ACROSS DESERTS AND LEAD HER THROUGH JUNGLES AND TAKE HER ACROSS THE OCEANS AND WE'LL MAKE LOVE IN THE MIDST OF RAGING BATTLES AND SLEEP IN THE MANSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL GANGSTERS AS WELL AS THE CAVES OF OLD HERMITS AND THERE'LL BE NO TIME TO PAY HOMAGE TO THE DEAD!





HMM... I WONDER WHAT THIS LUMP COULD POSSIBLY BE...



YEOWCH!
YEECH! A NASTY CREEPY CRAWLING THING!



YOU LITTLE JERK! I OUGHT TO BRING MY FIST DOWN ON YOU AND FLATTEN YOU OUT CLEAN AS A PANCAKE, BUT SINCE I HAVE SUCH AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING COMPASSION FOR MY FELLOW CREATURES, I WON'T!



WELL, I'LL BE!
OF ALL THE NERVE! I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT I HAVE EVERY RIGHT AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN TO CRUNCH THE FINGER OF ANYONE WHO BARGES IN ON MY PERSONAL HOUSE AND HOME!



WHAT? YOUR HOUSE AND HOME?

CAN'T YOU READ, BUDDY?

HEY! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY SUITCASE?







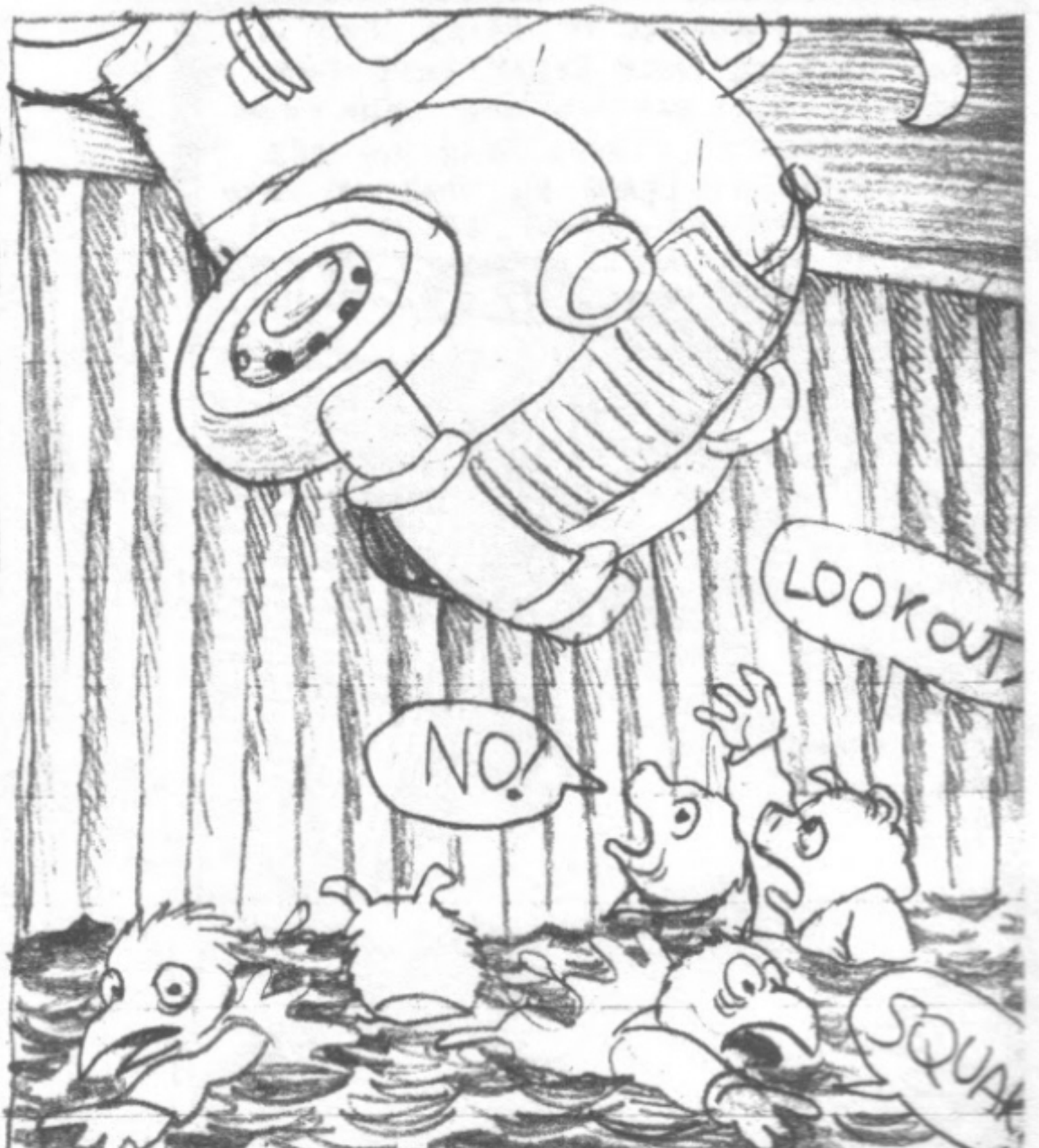














MY GABRIELLE! WE MUST NEVER AGAIN BE PARTED!
ONLY WITH YOU AM I FULLY AWAKE!
ONLY IN YOU IS THERE LIFE!
THERE'S HER HOUSE! YAY!



MY HEART IS POUNDING WITH
DESIRE FOR YOU, GABRIELLE! MY HEAD
SWIRLS WITH LOVE FOR YOU...



AHH.. YOU DEAR SWEETNIK!



KISS KISS
KISS KISS







GABRIELLE, ARE YOU
READY TO RUN AWAY WITH
ME TONIGHT?



YES! YES!



THEN COME, MY LUSCIOUS
NYMPHET, COME WITH ME TO
THE LIFE OF THE OPEN HIGHWAYS AND
THE THOUSAND CITIES AND FORESTS AND
FIELDS AND RIVERS AND...



WAIT FRITZ! WE CAN'T JUST JUMP
OUT THE WINDOW! WE'RE LIABLE TO GET
INJURED, YOU IDIOT!

HEH HEH.. GUESS I'M
A LITTLE EXCITED
ABOUT THE WHOLE
BUSINESS!













AND SO FRITZ AND GABRIELLE
COME TO KNOW WHAT HEAVEN IS!



THE COCK CROWED THREE TIMES...
AN EVIL OMEN... A WARNING OF
DANGERS TO COME! A SIGN THAT WE
MUST BE CAUTIOUS AND STEP LIGHTLY
AND LOOK ASKANCE AT STRANGERS
AND BEWARE OF TOO MUCH SMILING AND
LAUGHTER...

GEE WHIZ!
IS IT REALLY?

NO, NOT REALLY, YOU INNOCENT
ANGEL CHILD... ALLOW UNCLE FRITZ
TO KISS AWAY ALL YOUR TENDER
LITTLE FEARS...

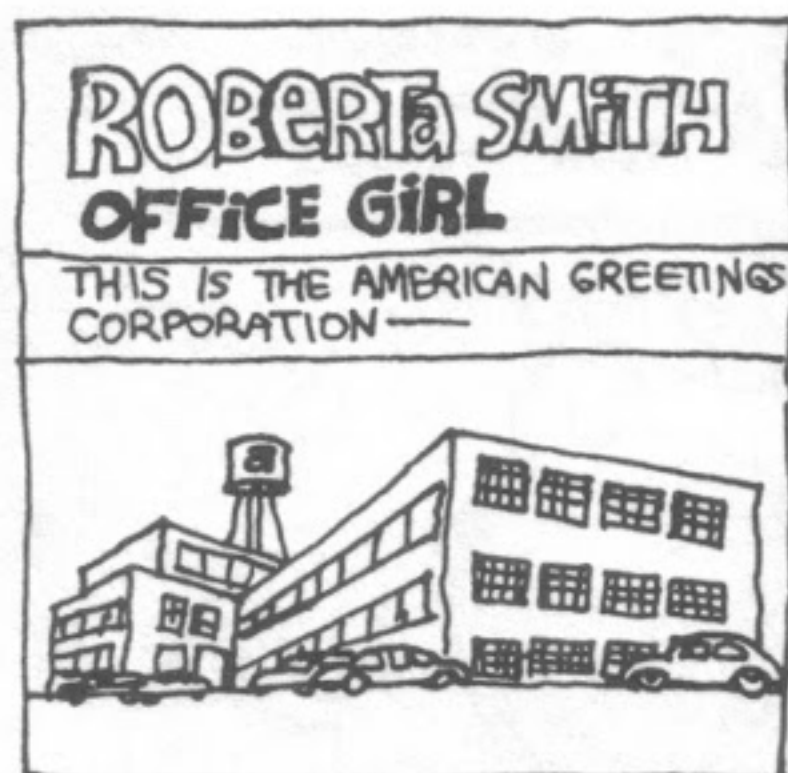
SMOOCH!

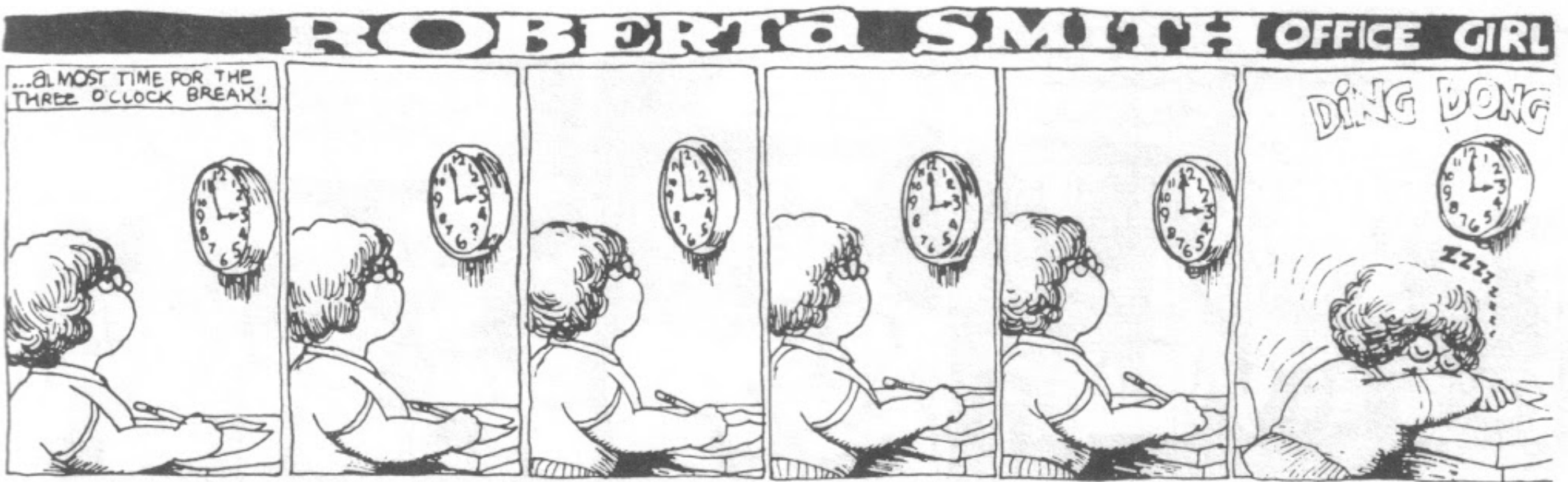
BUT IT DOES MEAN THAT THE
NIGHT IS WAINING AND WE'D
BETTER GET GOING, GABRIELLE!

OBOY! FRITZ, I'M
SO EXCITED! I CAN'T
WAIT! LET'S
HURRY!

LOOK... THE SUN IS JUST
COMING UP, GABRIELLE... THE DAWN
OF A NEW DAY...

...AND A NEW LIFE
FOR ME... YIPPEE!





ROBERTA SMITH OFFICE GIRL



ROBERTA SMITH-OFFICE GIRL



OH OH...
HERE SHE COMES!



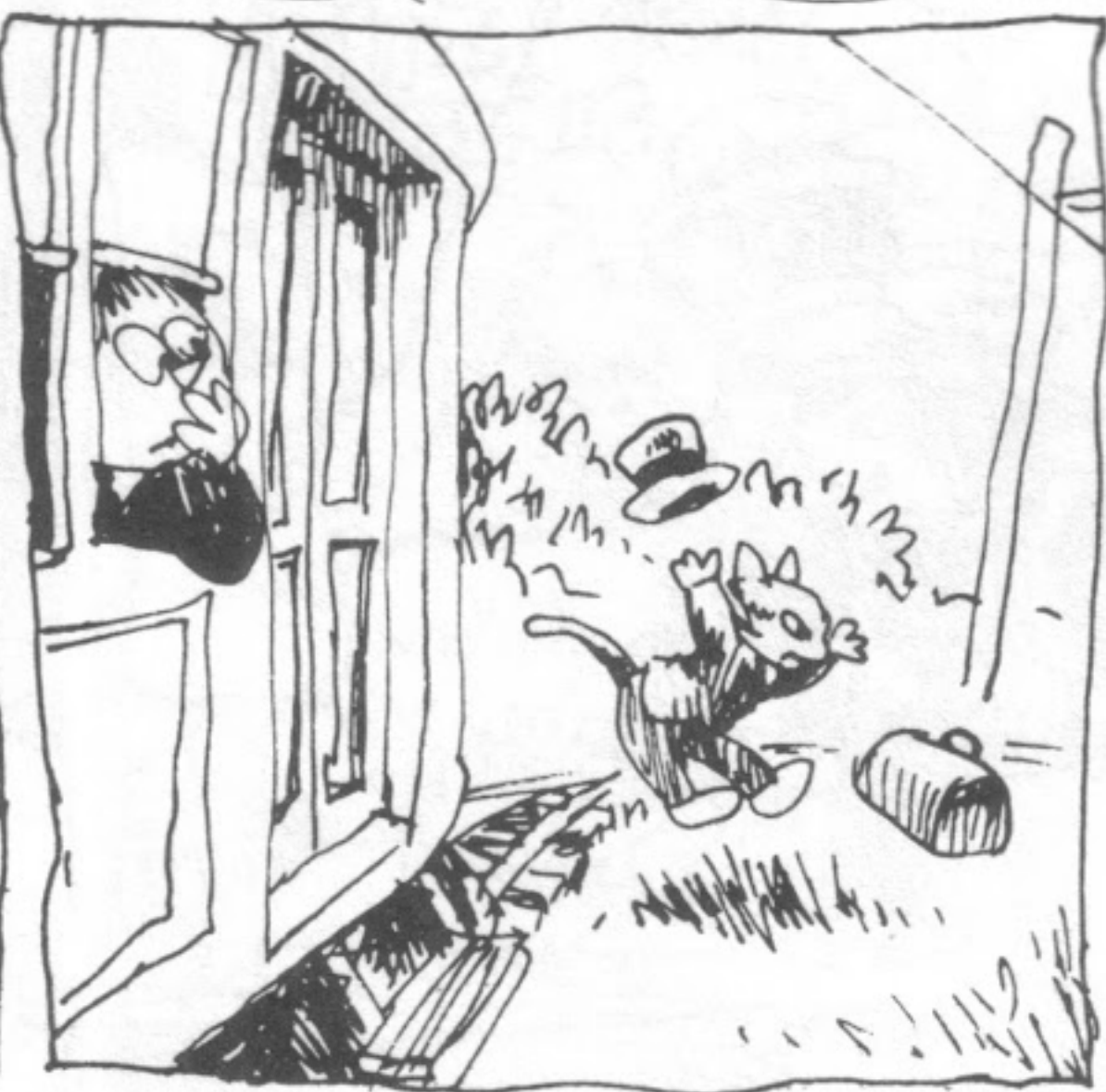
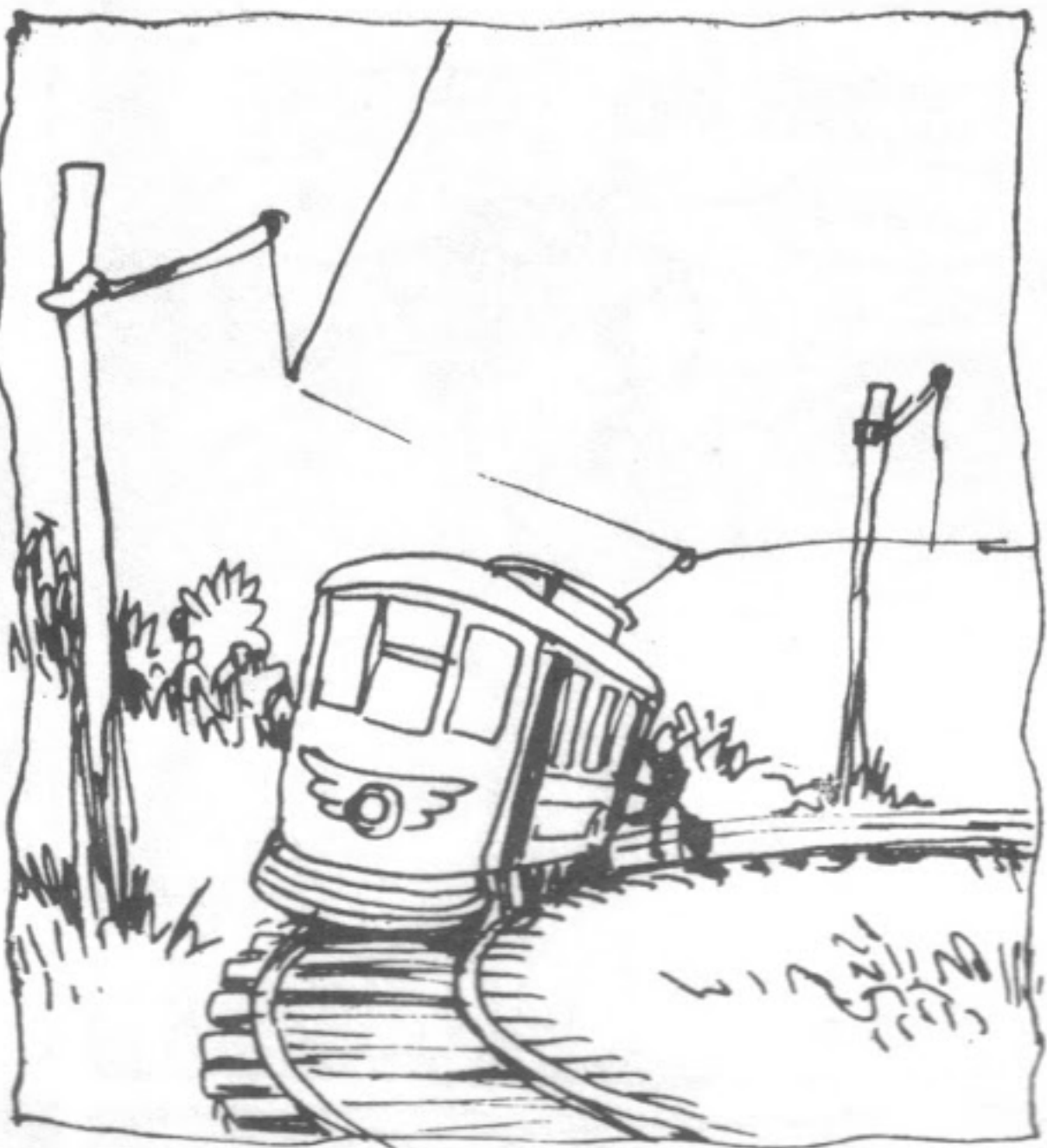
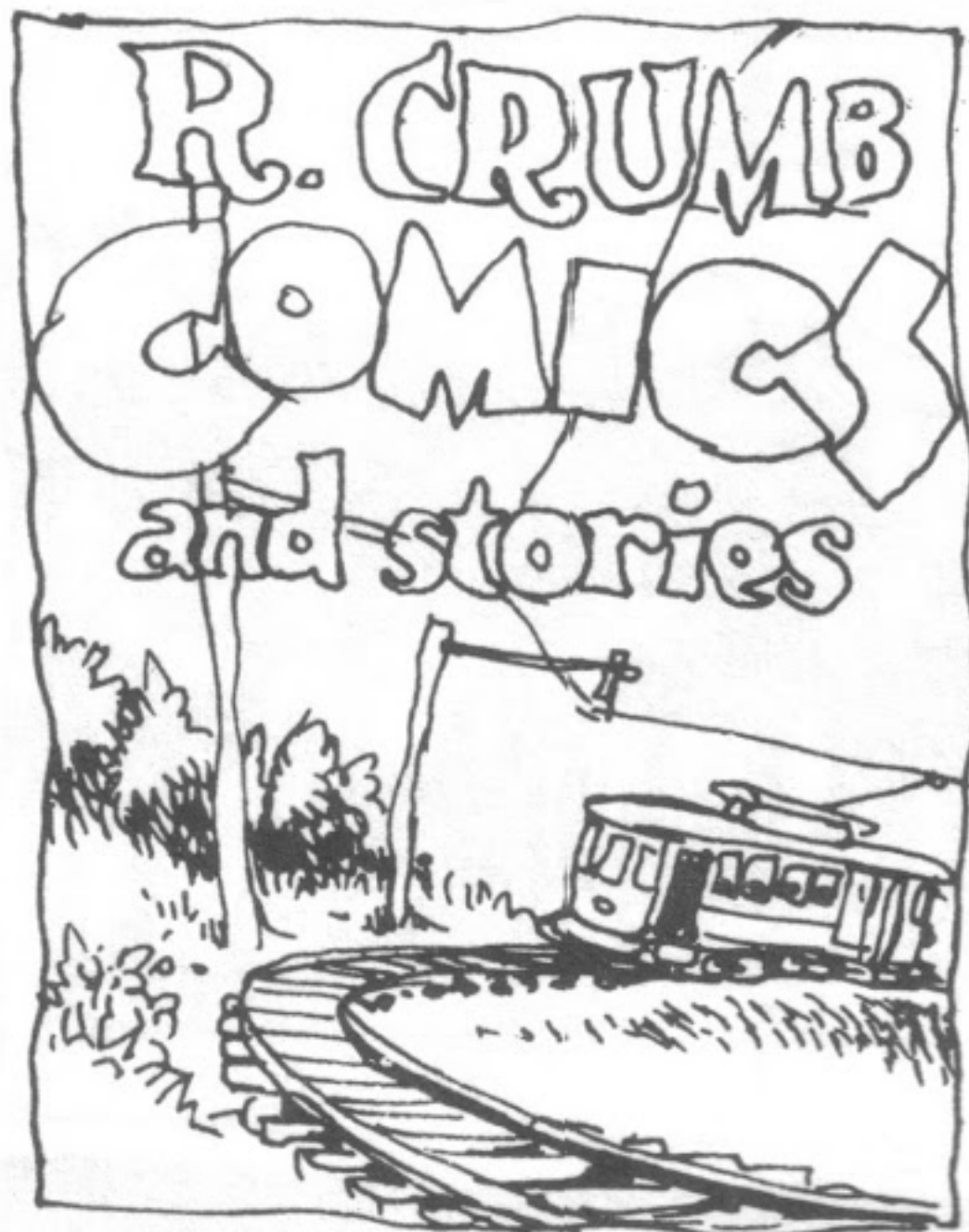
Roberta Smith - Office Girl





Roberta Smith Office Girl





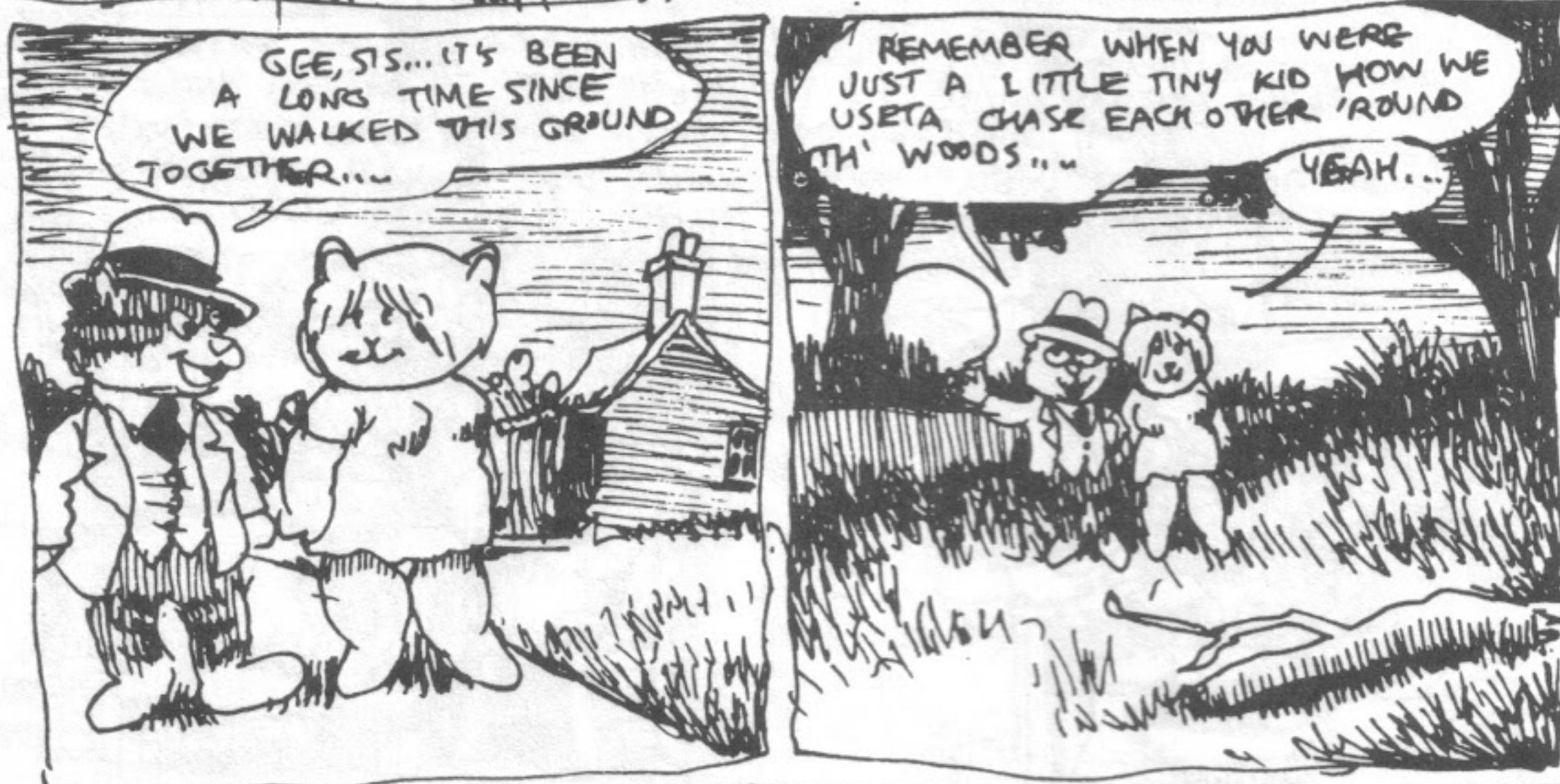


AHH... SIGH...





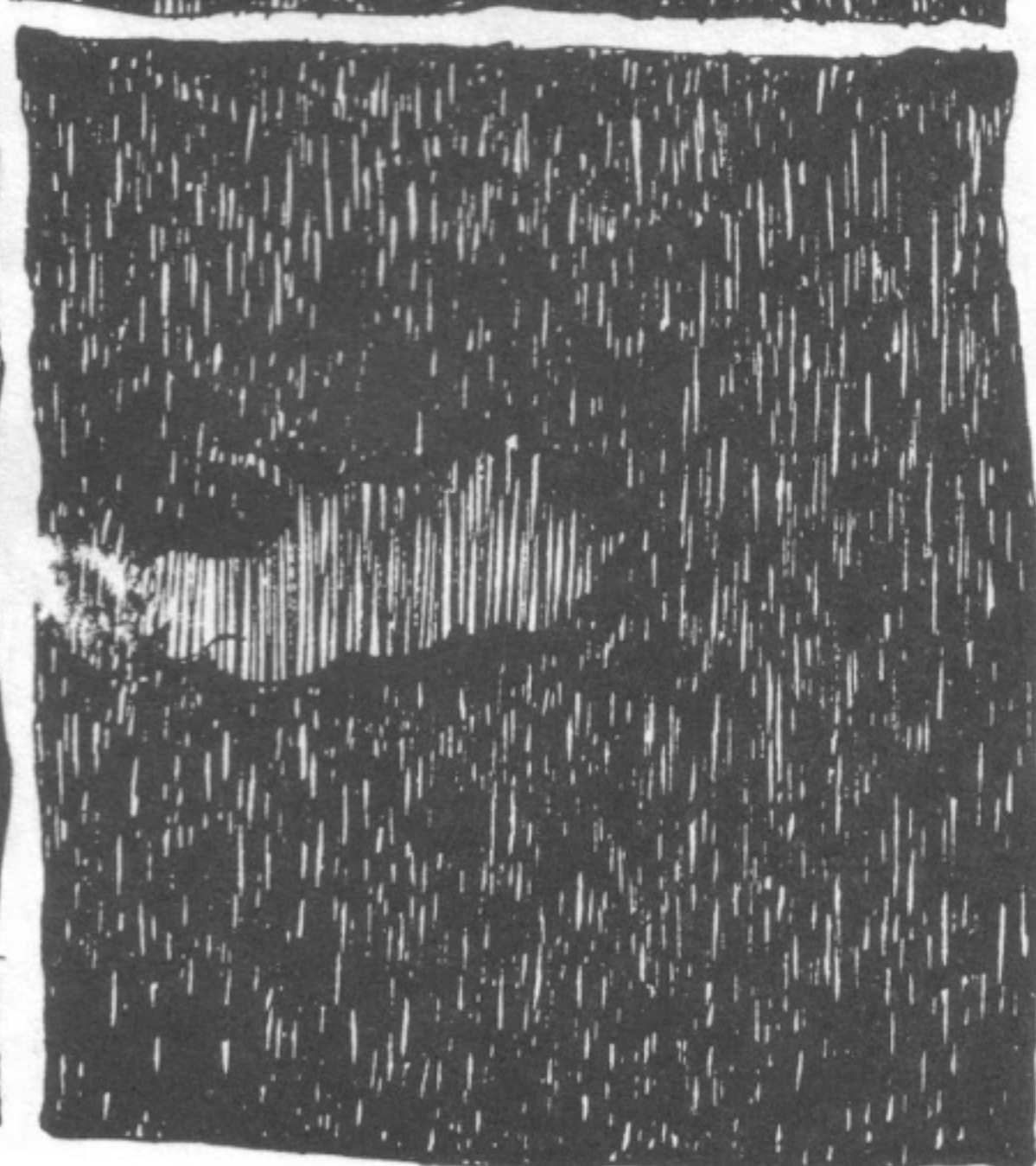
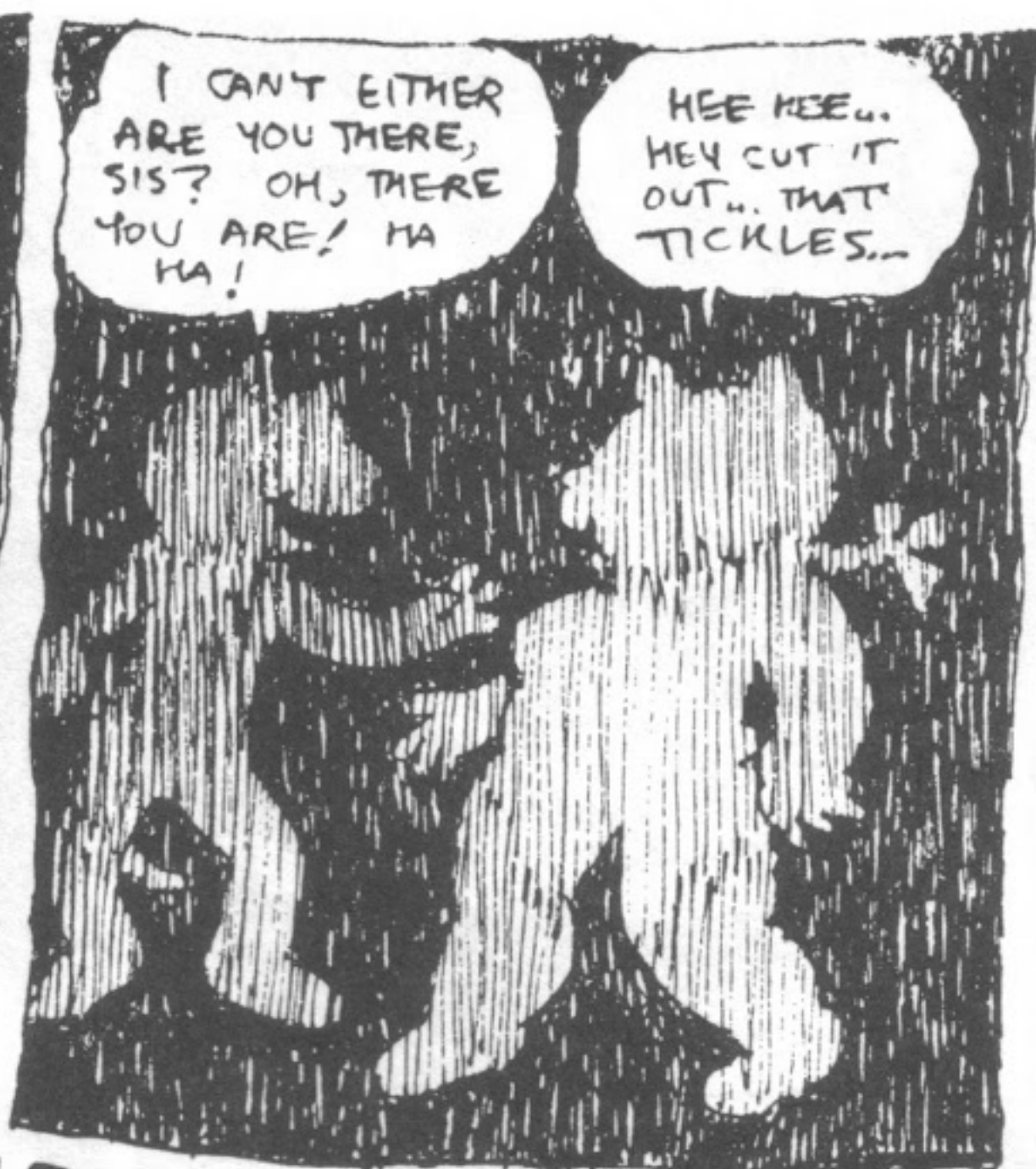












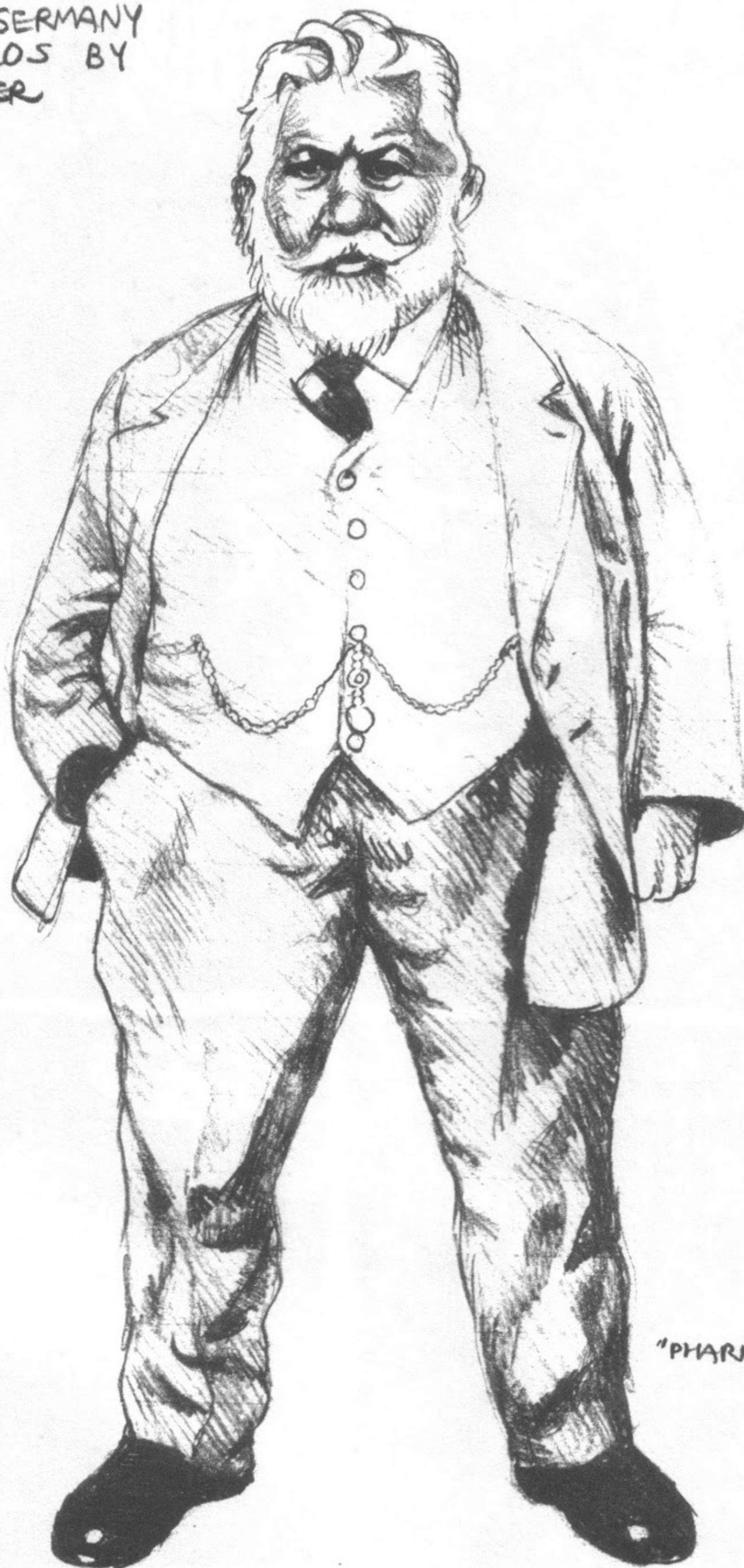
ARCADE

For
June
1962
NUMBER
TWENTY
THREE

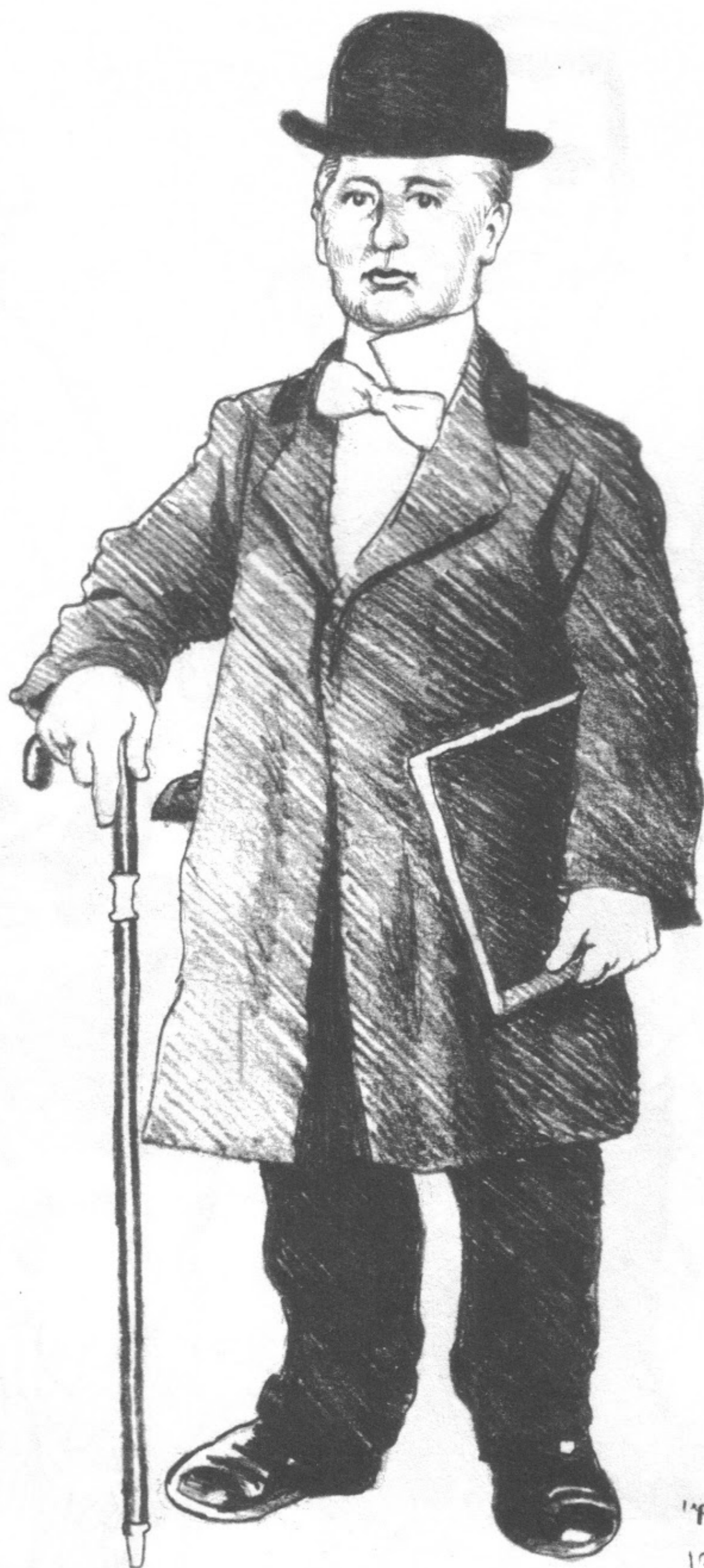
R. CRUMB
12 MARCH 1962



DRAWINGS MADE
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS
TAKEN IN GERMANY
IN THE 1920S BY
AUGUST SANDER



"PHARMACIST"



"PIANIST"
13 MARCH 1962

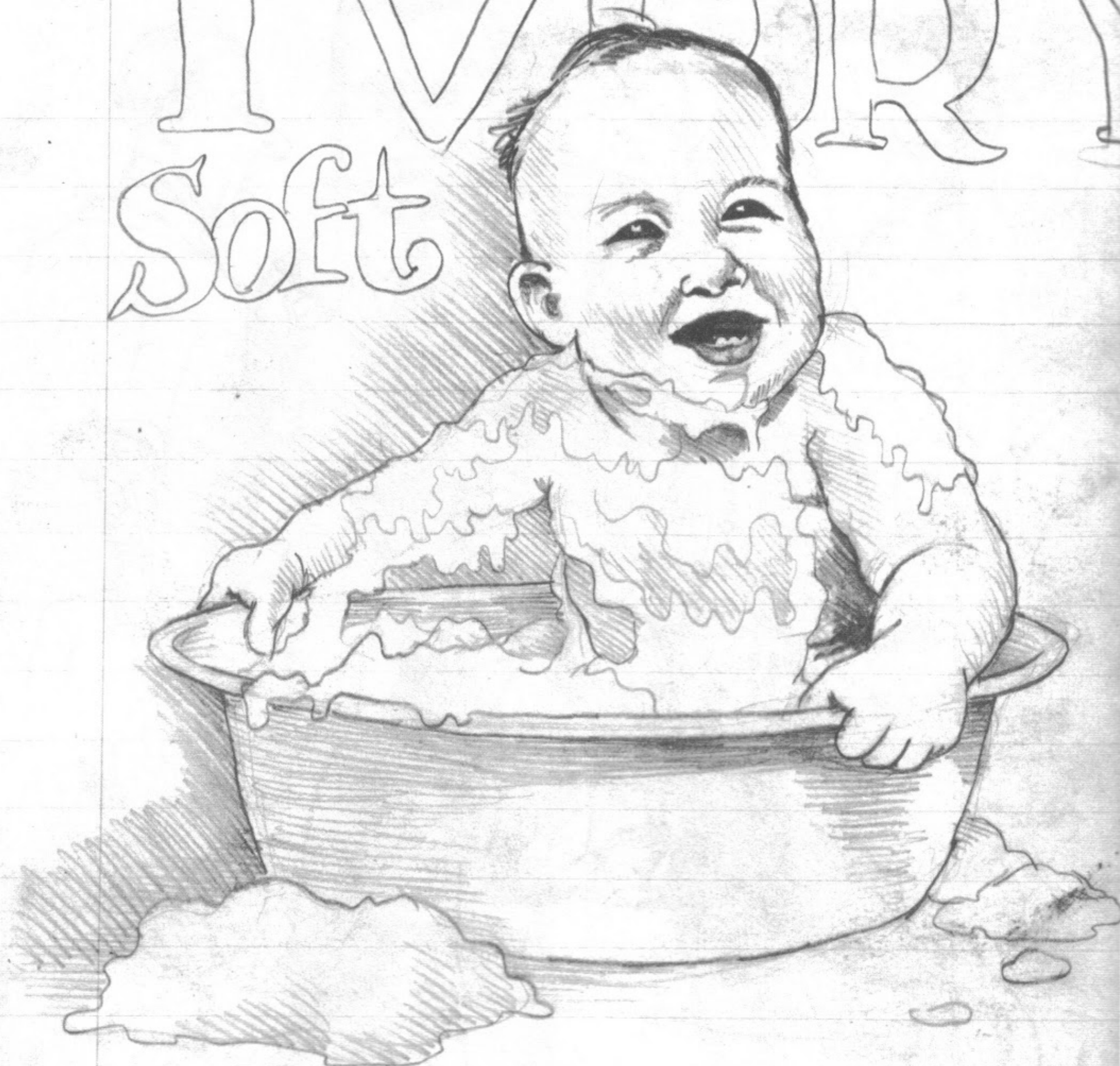


"APPRENTICE
TEACHER"



IVORY

Soft



99 $\frac{44}{100}$ Percent Pure
Chicken-fat

© MARCH 16, 1962





FROM
GERMAN
PHOTOGRAPH



"PASTRY
COOK"



ELECTION



★ ELECTION NUMBER

ARCADE



R. CRUMB '61

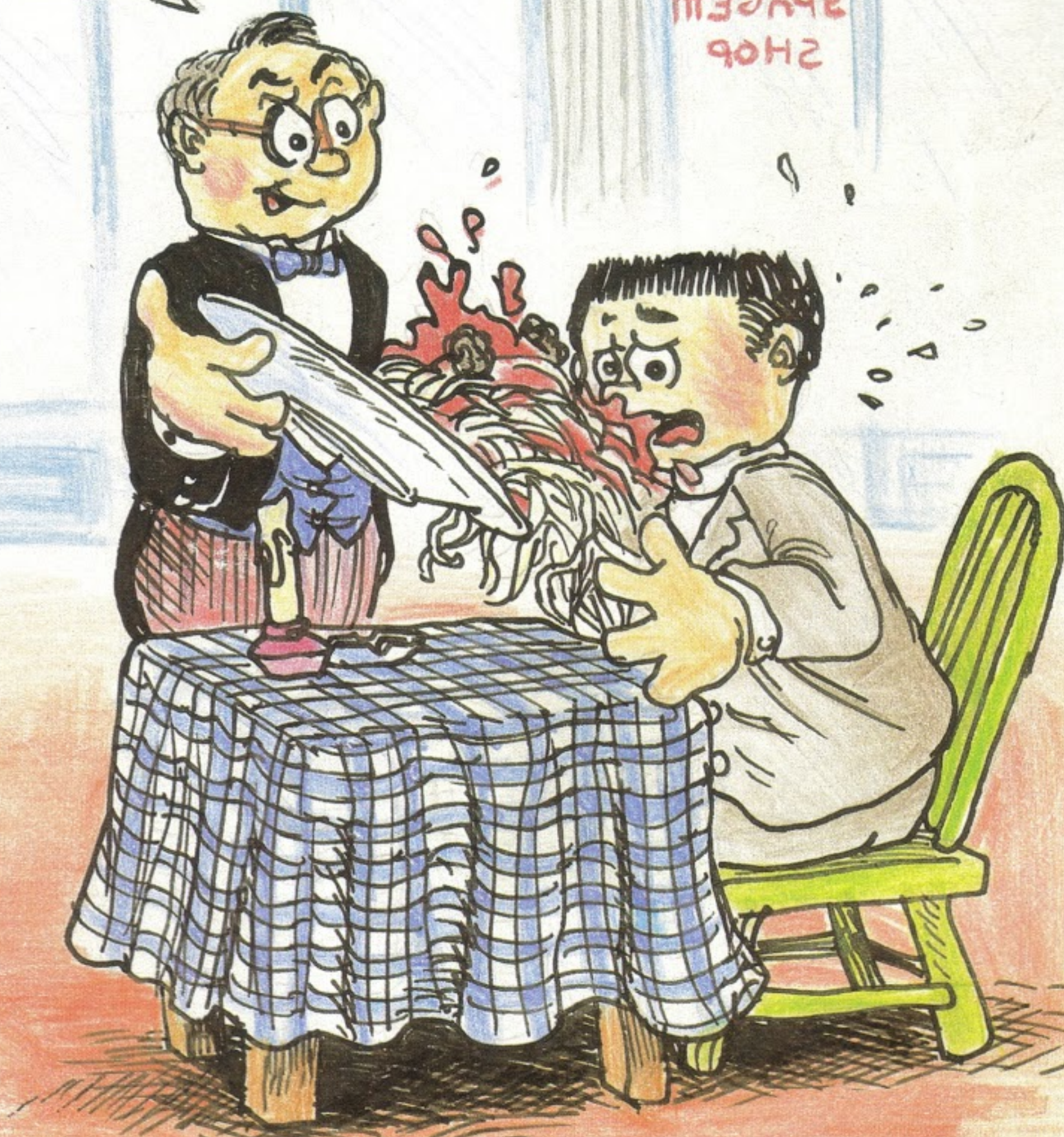
MANAGER: BUT "GOOKIE", YOU'VE GOT TO GO OUT THERE! THEY'RE YOUR ADORING FANS! THEY BUY YOUR RECORDS! THEY MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO HAVE YOUR LITTLE THIRTY-TWO ROOM COTTAGE AND CUSTOM SPORTS CARS!

farb

NO. 5

OOPS, SORRY!

SPACETTI
SHOP

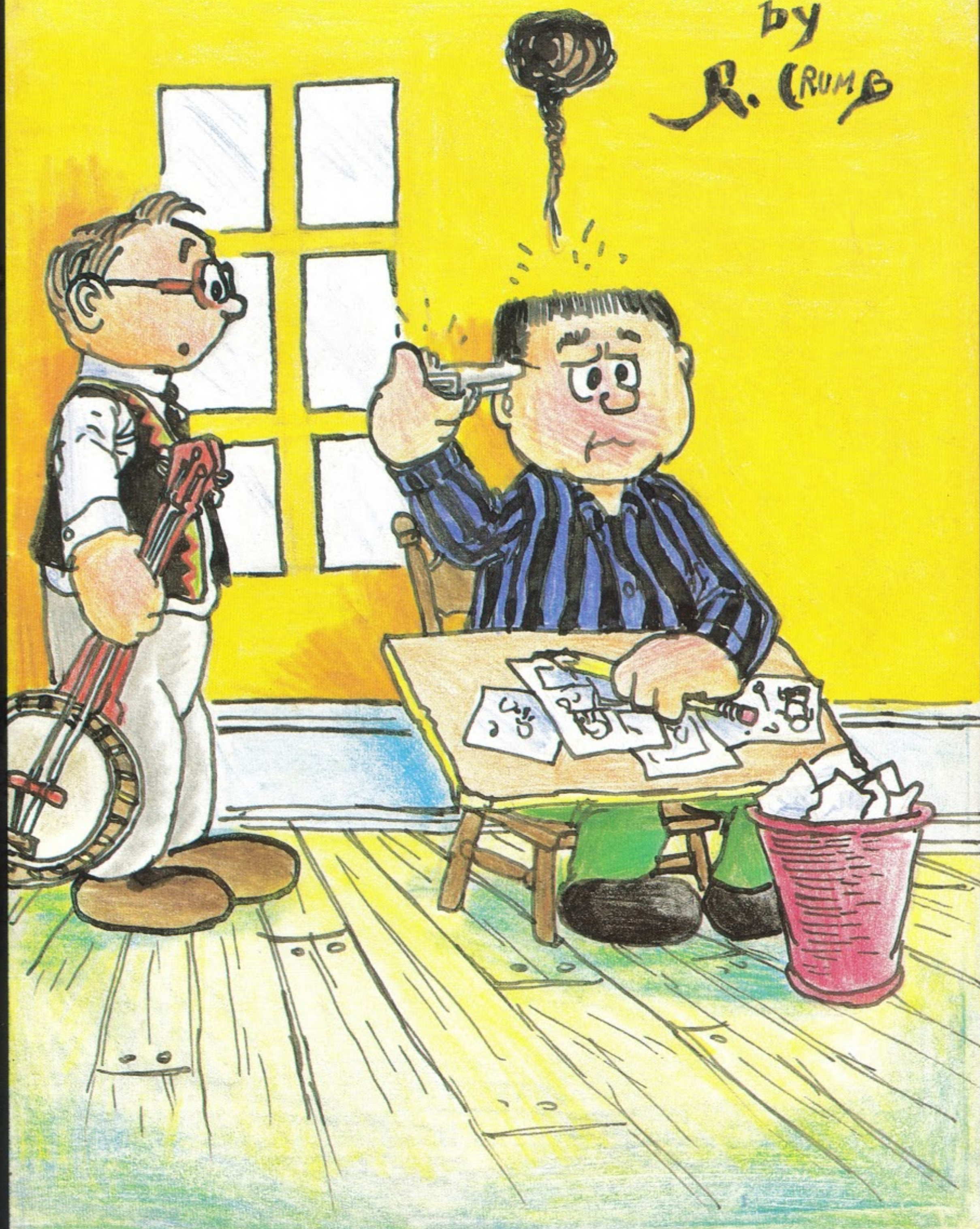


farb

NO. 6

25 APRIL 1959

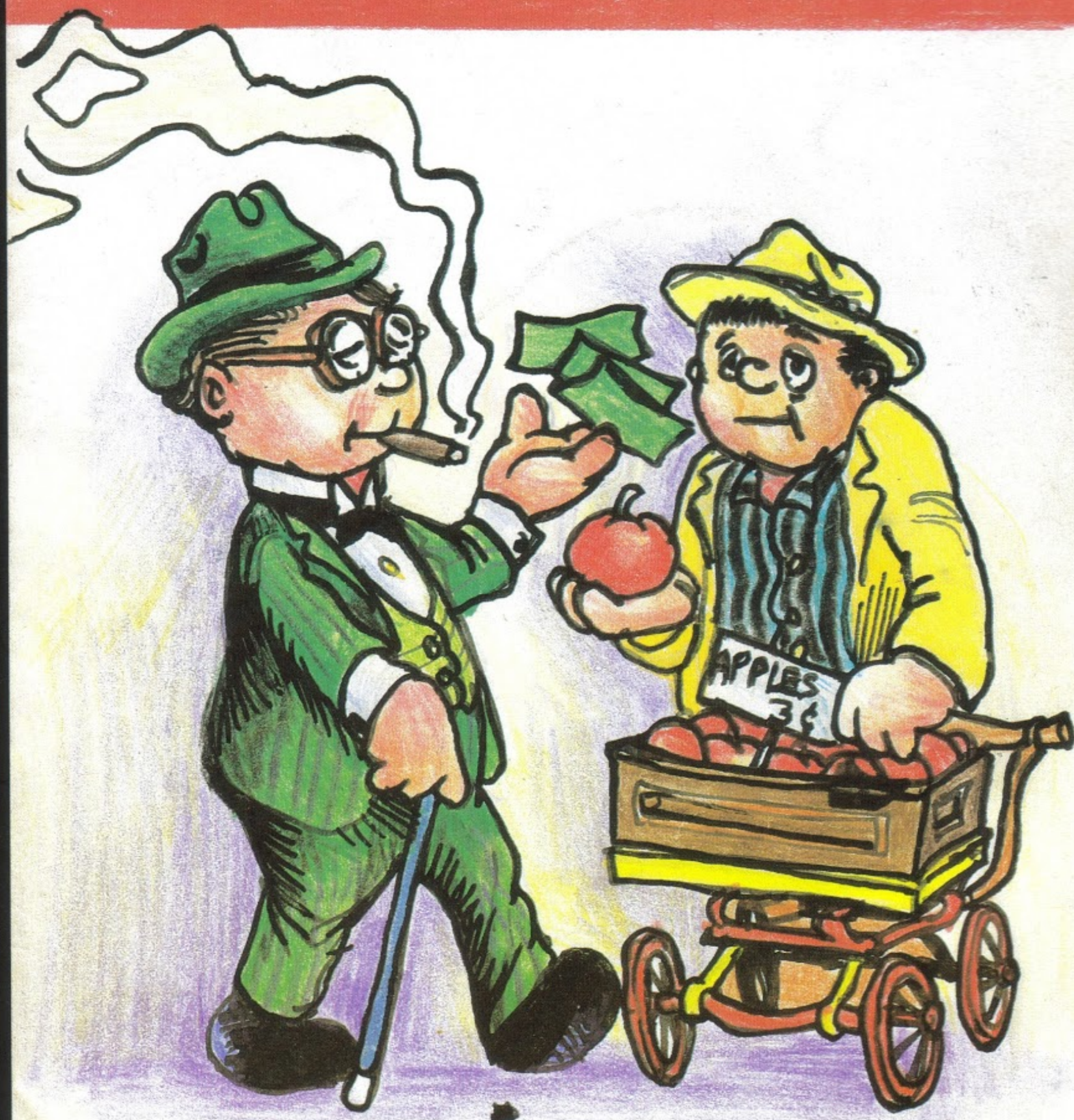
by
R. CRUMB



Farlo

No. 7

MAY, 1959



P. CRUMB '59

Farb

NO. 10

JUNE 20, 1959



R. CRUMB

BRIT'S A SOREHEAD

R. CRUMB'S

NOTE

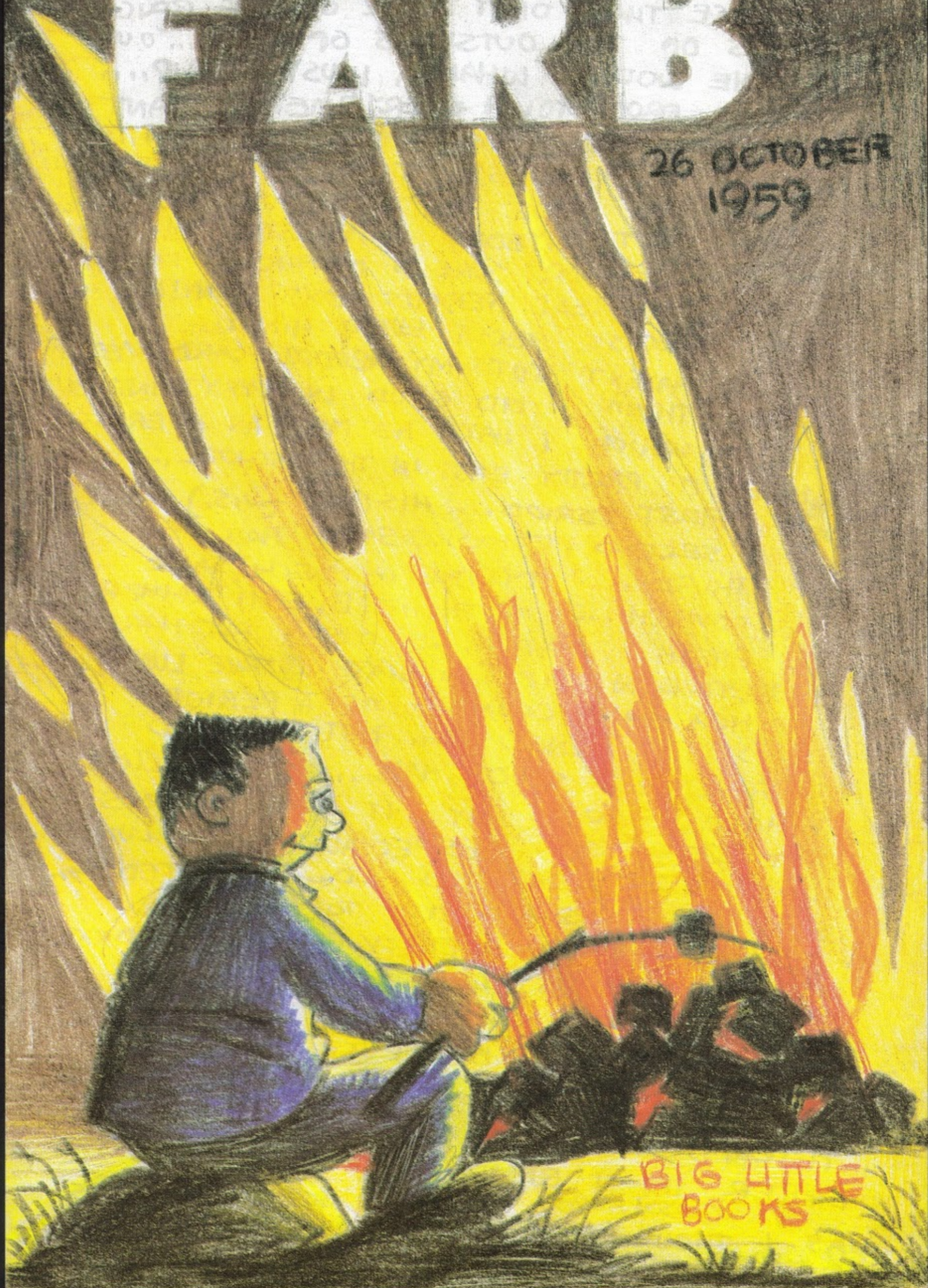
TO MARTY PAHLS

23 OCTOBER 1959



FARB

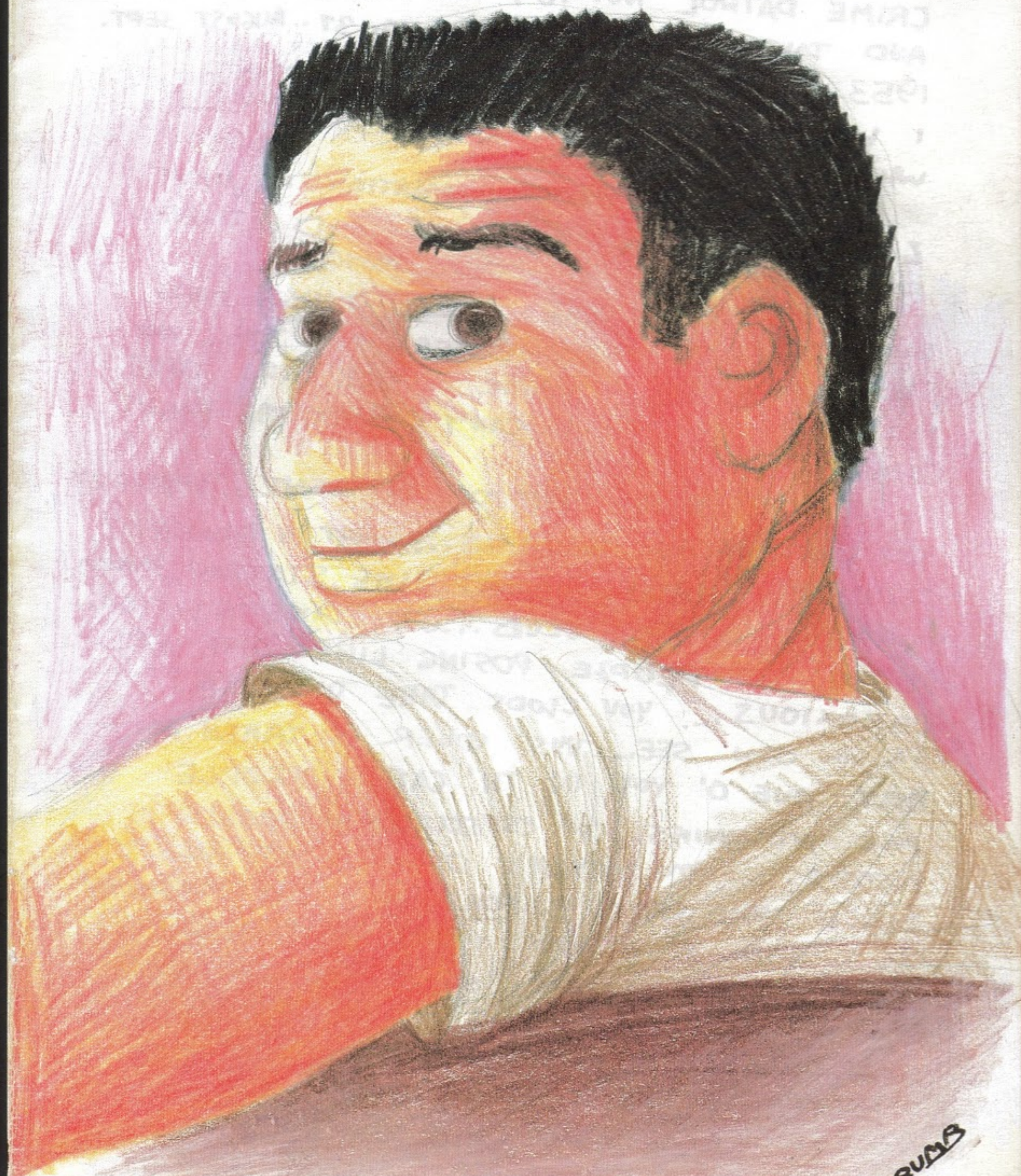
26 OCTOBER
1959



BIG LITTLE
BOOKS

SUNDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 1959

FARB



Britt the Clod

CRUMB

R. CRUMB'S

NOTE

12
NOVEMBER
1959

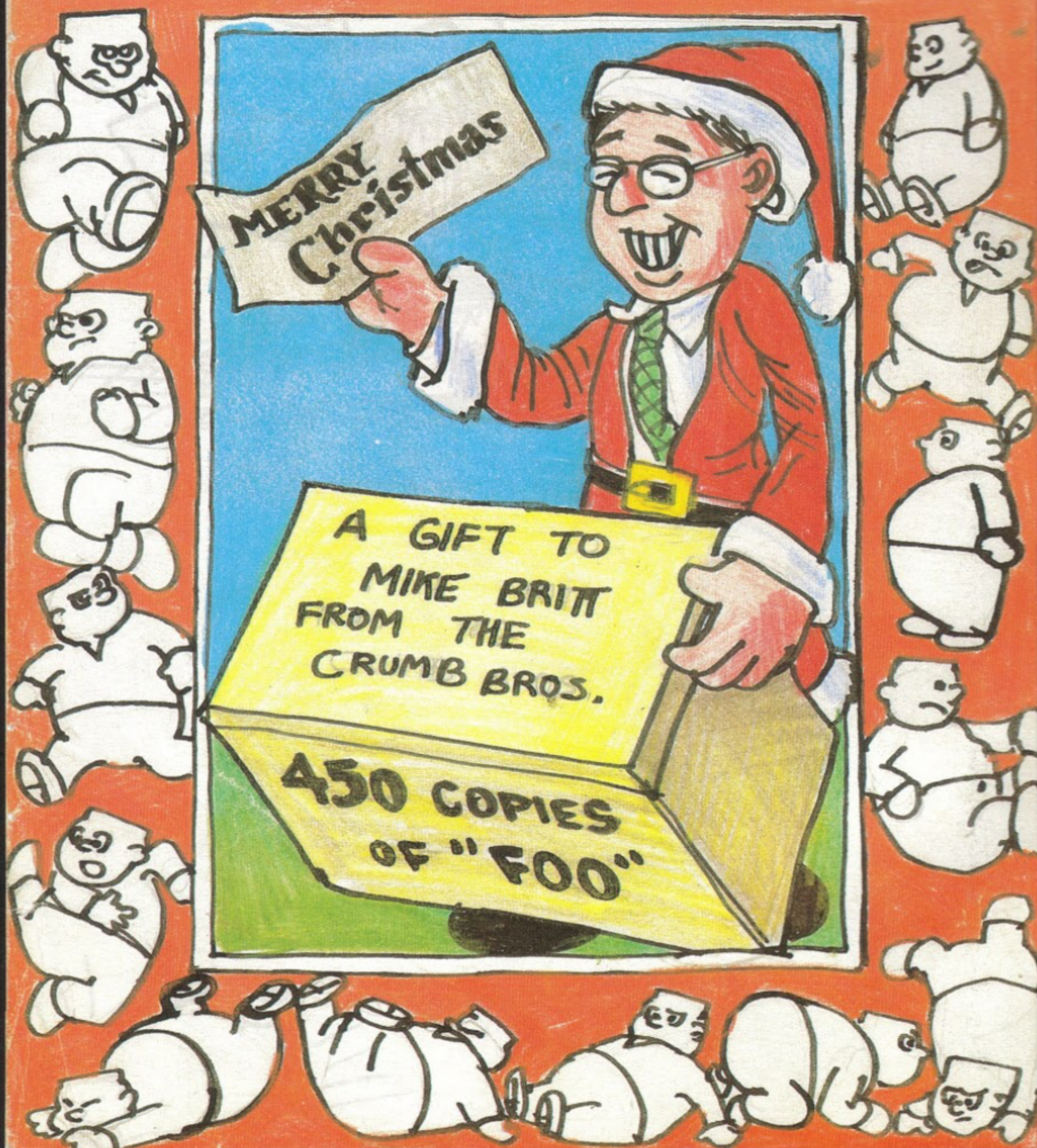
TO MARTY PAHLS



FARB

DECEMBER 18

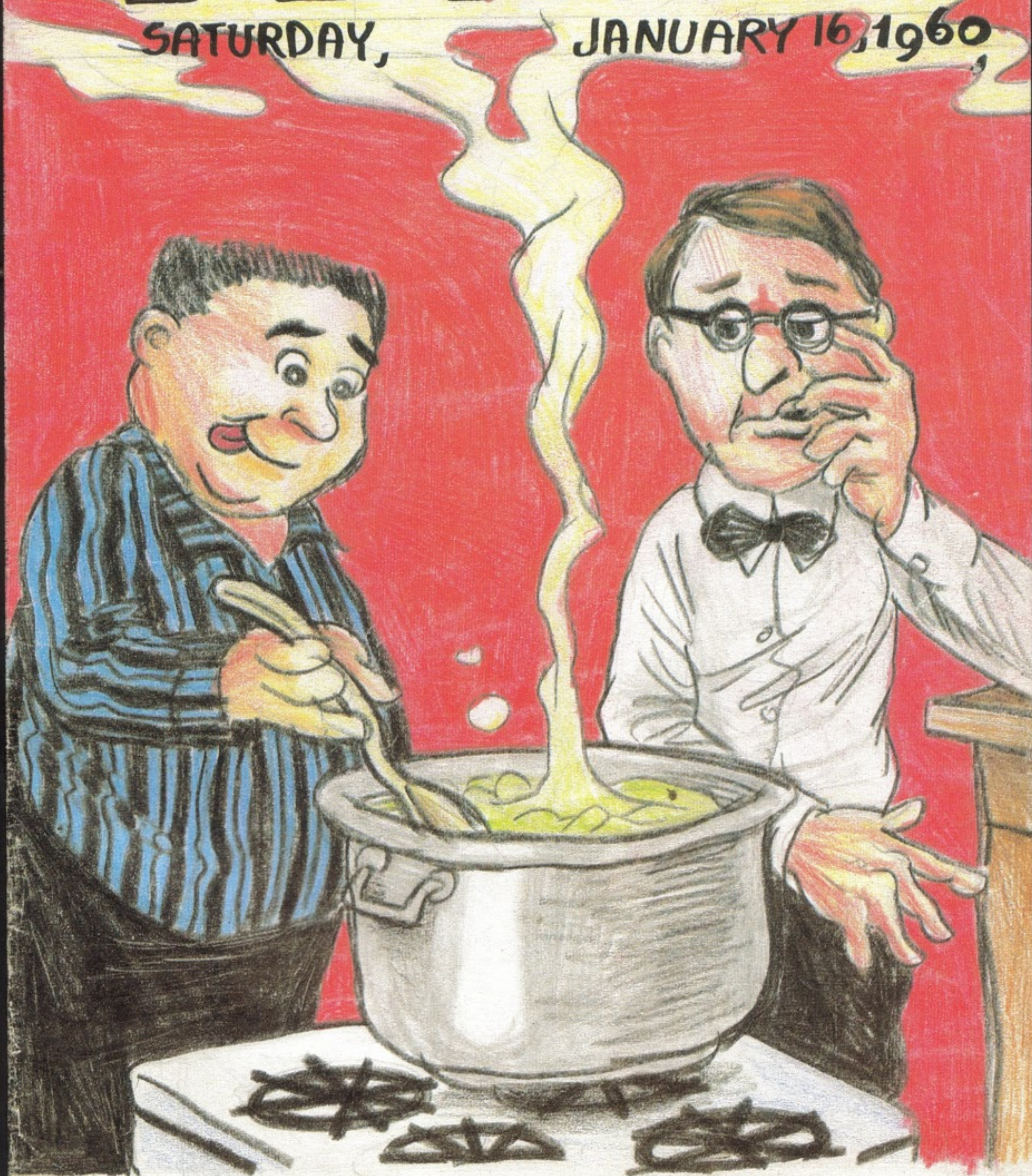
1959



FARB

SATURDAY,

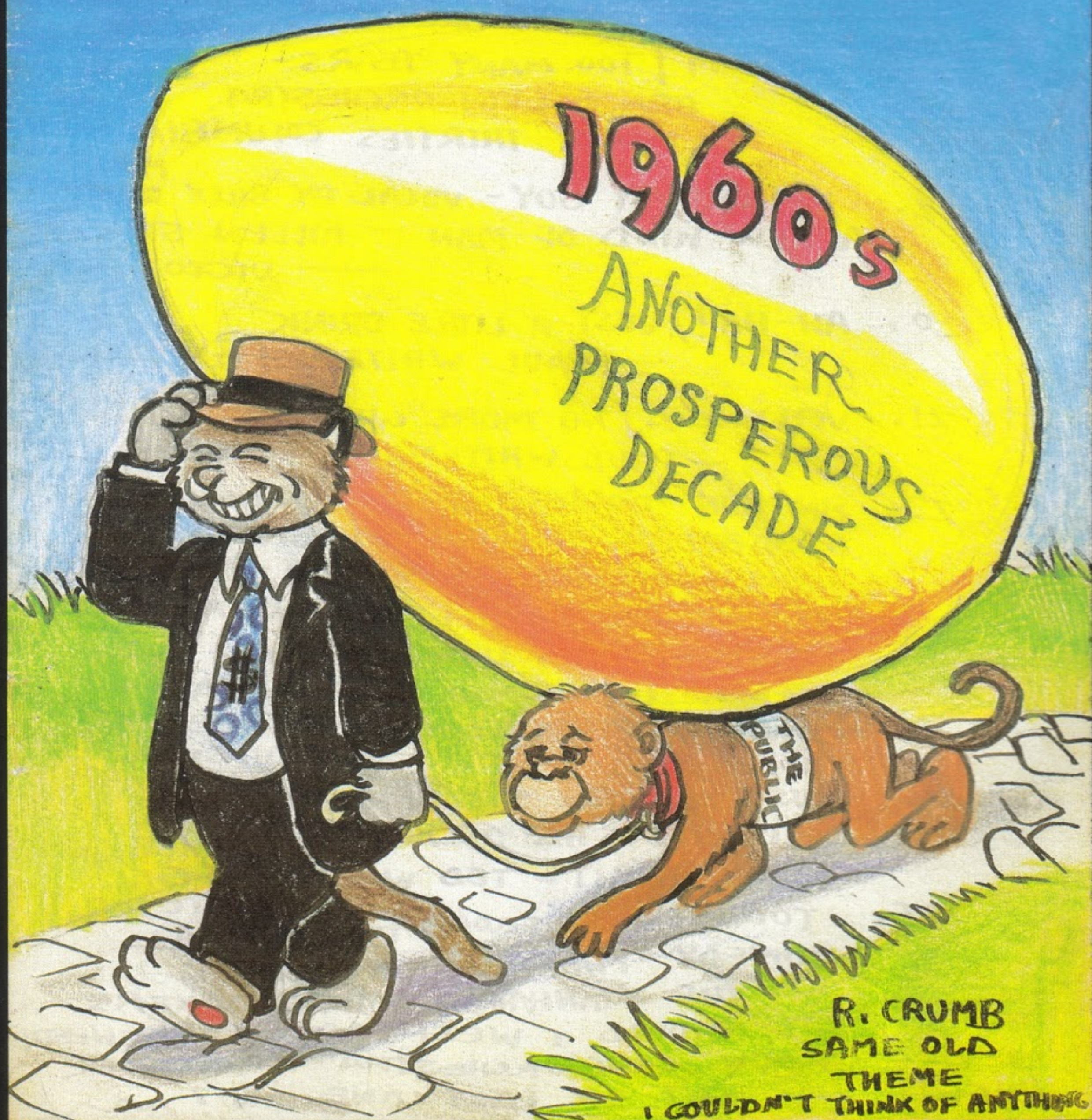
JANUARY 16, 1960,



...MIKE BRITT, THE COOK...

note

31 JANUARY 1960



FARB



NOTE

MARCH 17, 1960



R. CRUMB

ARCADE

NUMBER NINE
OCTOBER 1960

I AM A
MEMBER
OF THE
KOOKIE,
FRANKIE, FABIAN
AND ELVIS
FAN CLUB
SIGNED *[Signature]*



THE BIG TEEN ZINE
COOLCATS
THIS ISSUE!
BIG COLOR
FOLDOUT
OF FABIAN
PLUS
FORTY
NEW
INTIMATE
STORIES!!!

FABIAN
SWEATER

DICK
CLARK
YEAR
BOOK

TEEN
FUN

EXCLUSIVE
INSIDE THE
MURDER
DEBRIEF
MOVIE
CONFESSIONS
U2 & DEBBIE

THIS IS THE ULTIMATE ACHIEVEMENT
MADISON AVENUE AND HOLLYWOOD.

OF

.....R. CRUMP

ARCADE

September
1962
NUMBER
TWENTY-SIX

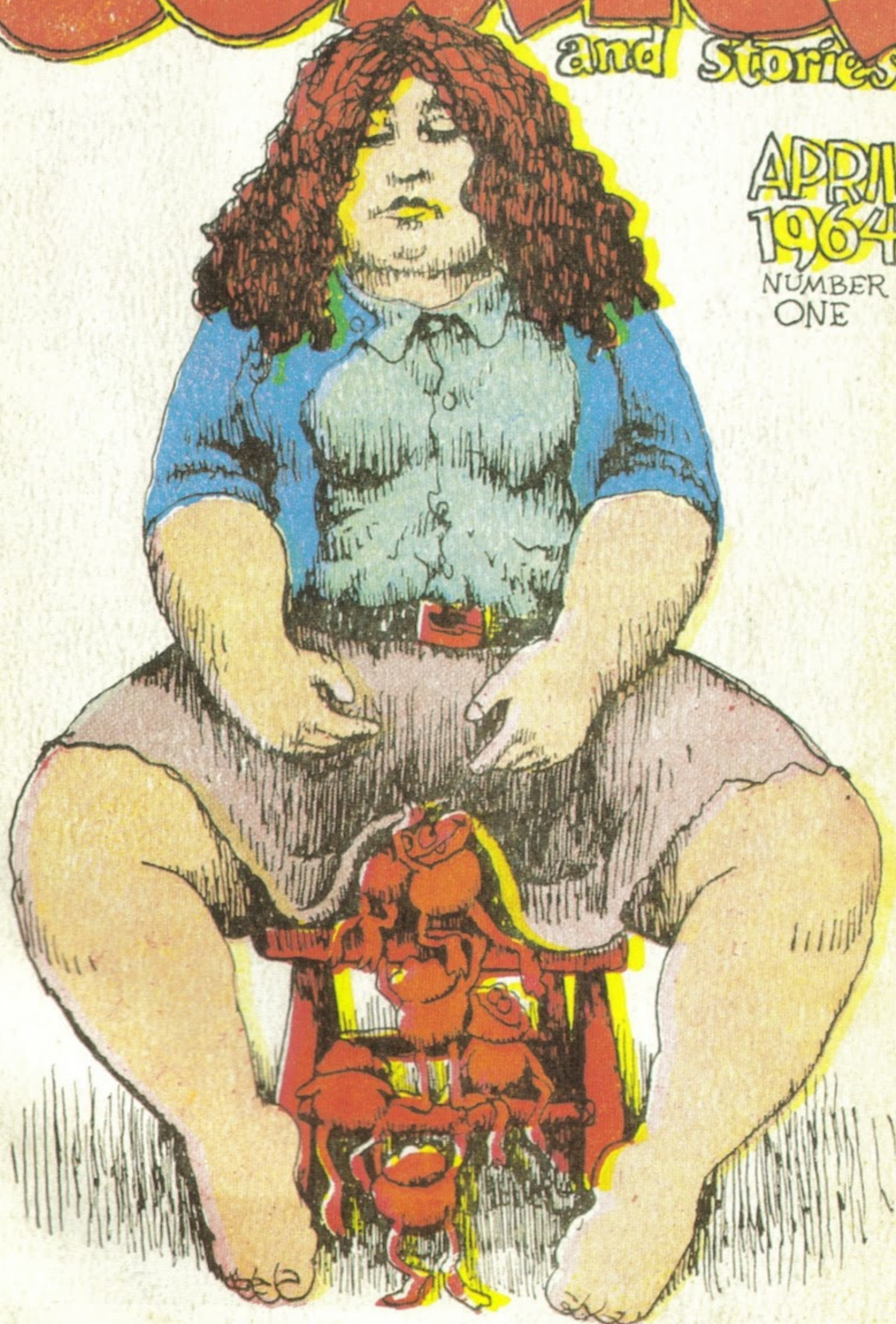
AHH...SIGH!
LIFE IS SWEET!



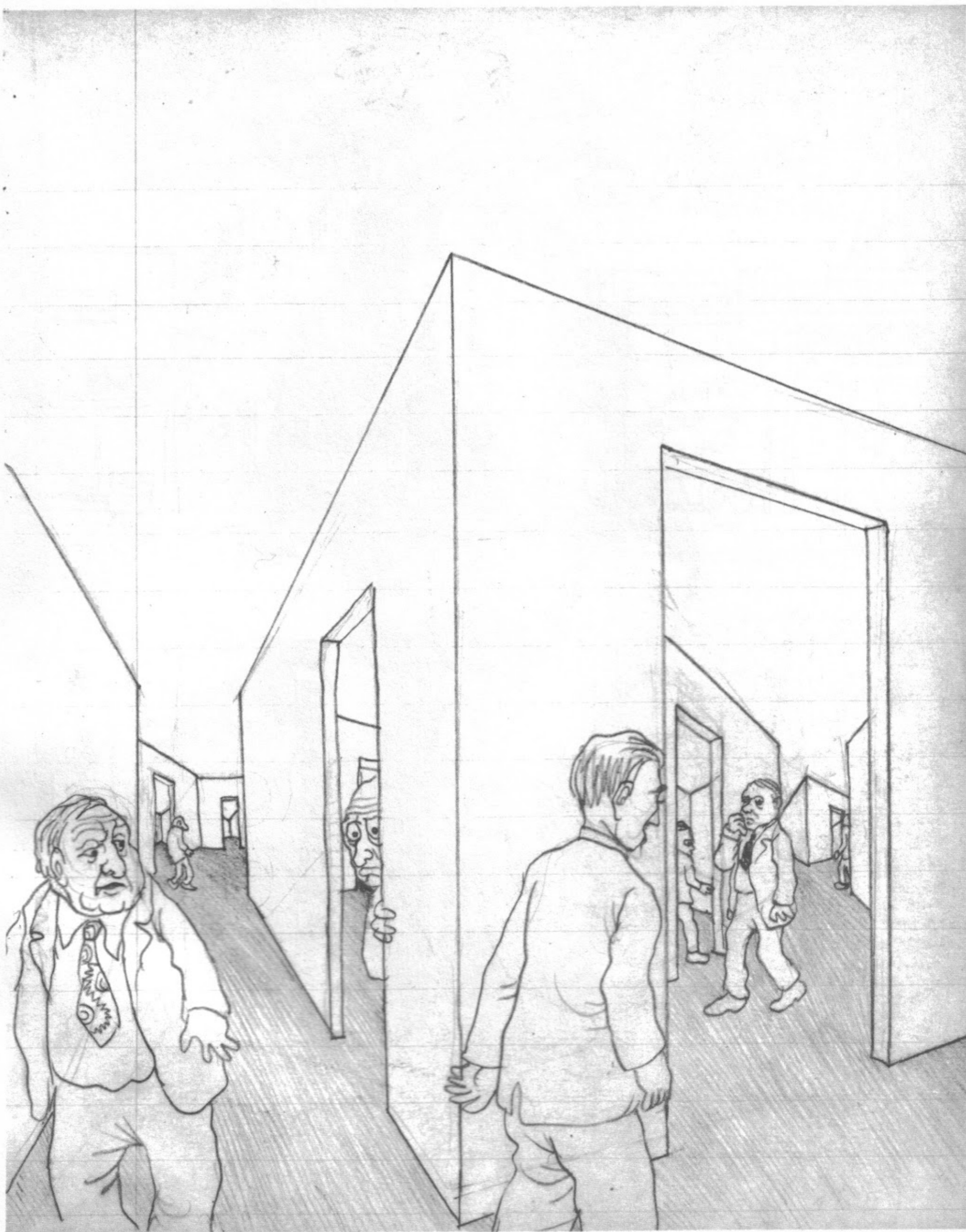
R. CRUMB'S COMICS

and Stories

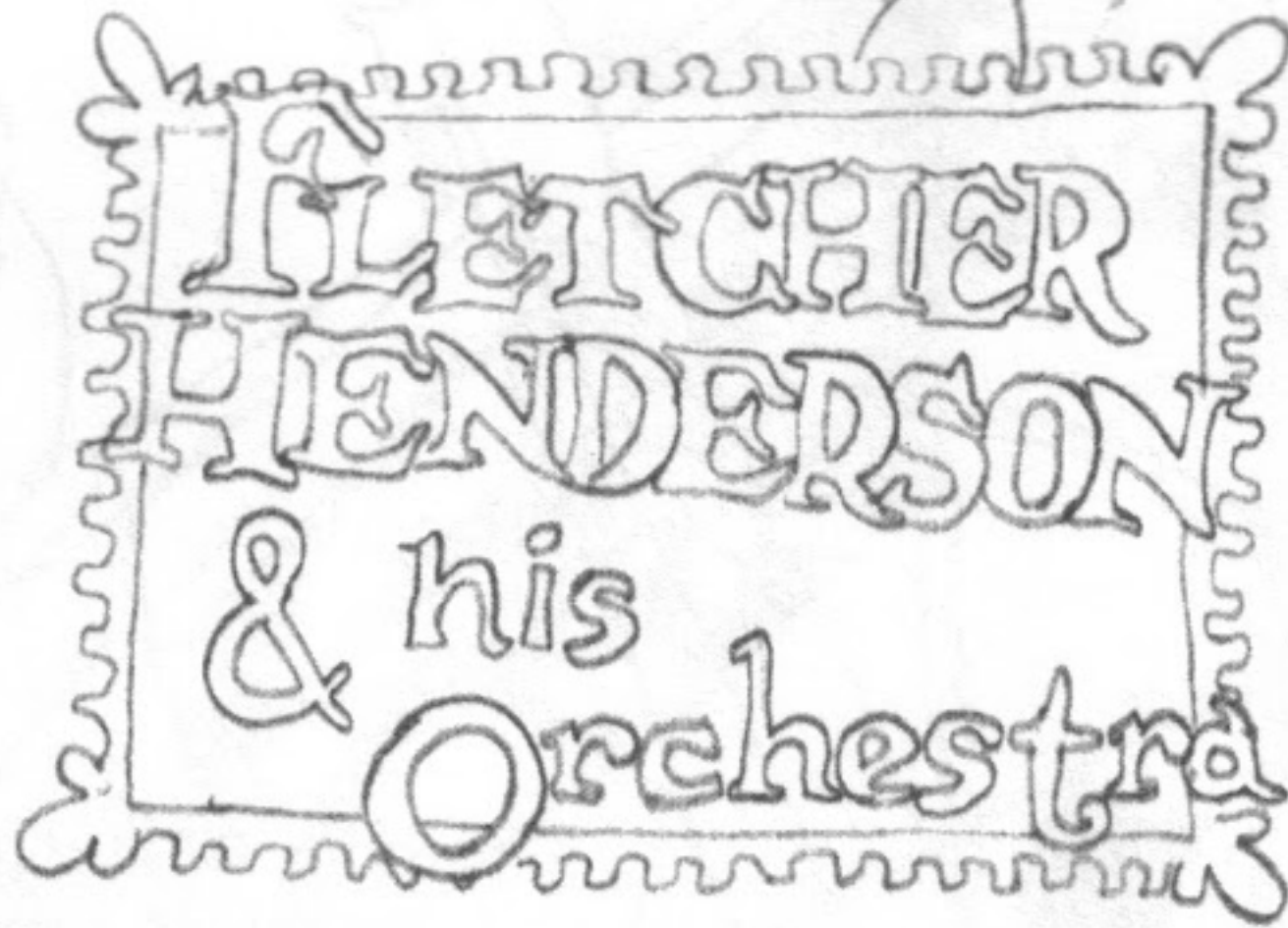
APRIL
1964
NUMBER
ONE







BARNEY
OLDFIELD



MAYOR JIMMY WALKER



THE KING







Texas
Guinan
1928

R. CRUMB
APRIL 12, 62



PAULINE LORD
IN
"ANNA CHRISTIE"

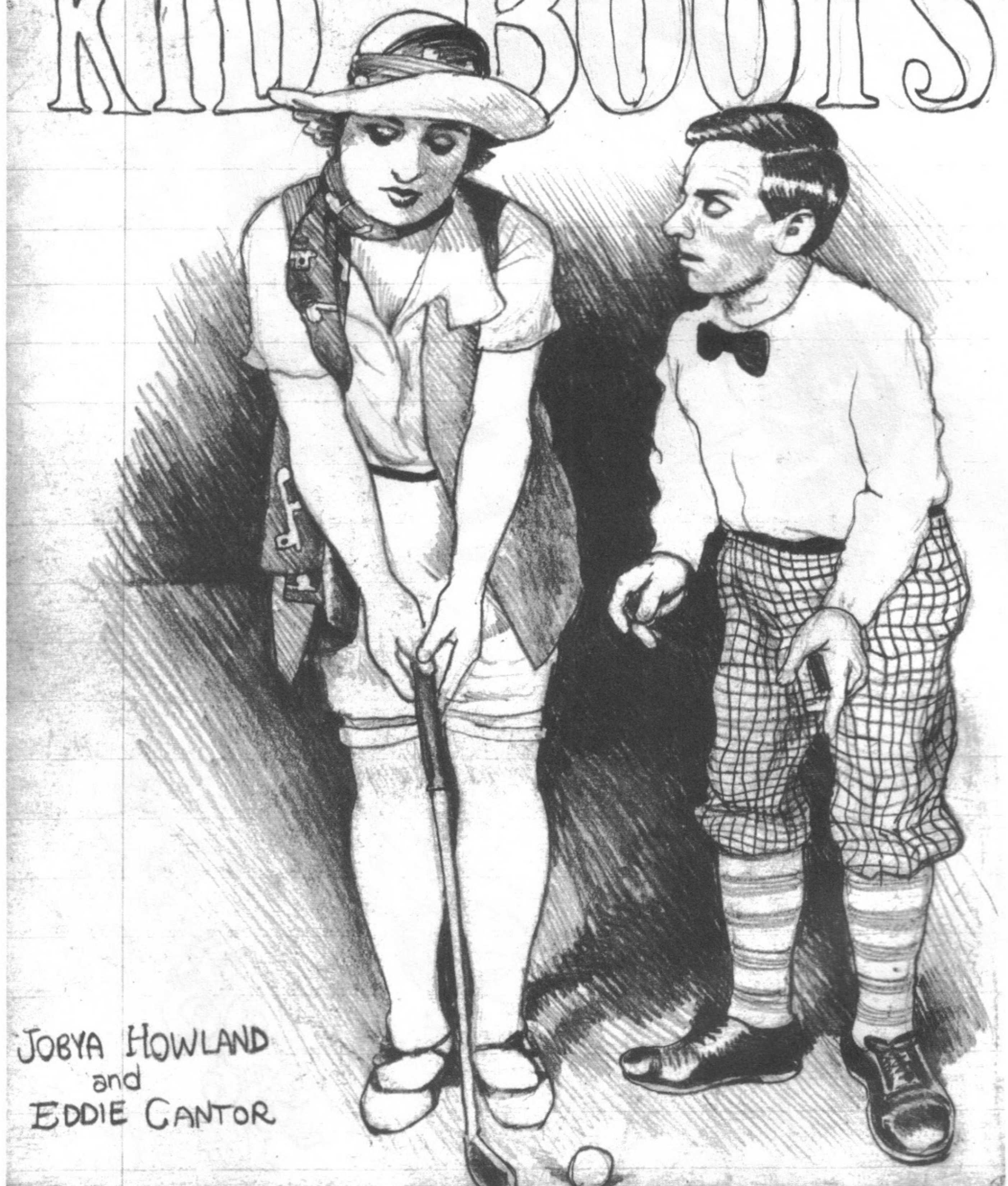


JOSEPH CANTHORN
IN
"THE SUNSHINE GIRL"



MILTON WALLACE
IN
"ABIE'S
IRISH
ROSE"

"KID BOOTS"



JOBYA HOWLAND
and
EDDIE CANTOR



Mae
West
~1926





Bella
Fox

~1900

(ORIGINATOR OF THE SPIT-CURL)

APRIL 23, 1962





LAURA HOPE
CREWS

1906



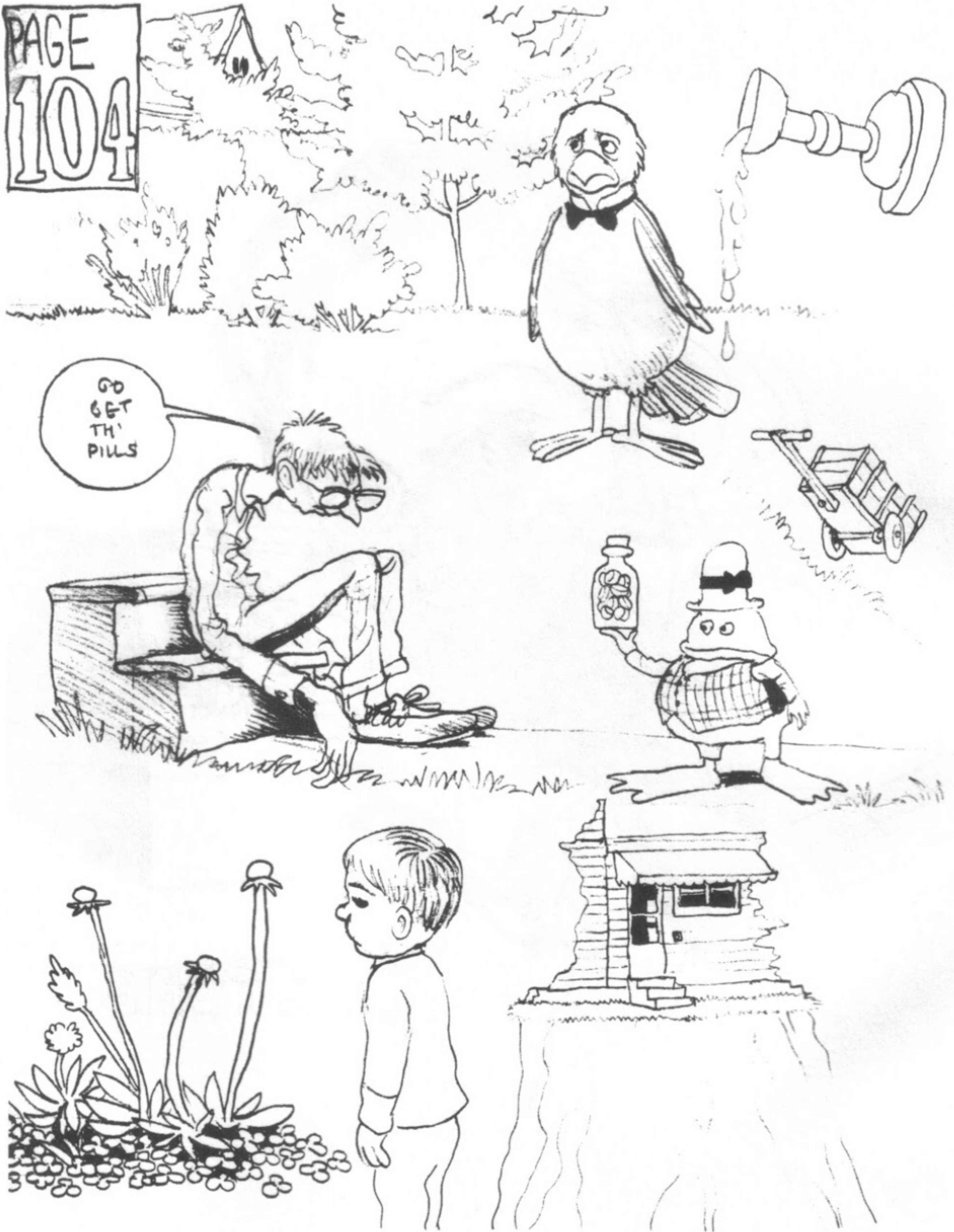
"GIVING LIFE IS A WORSE
CRIME THAN TAKING IT AWAY"
—C. CRUMB HAS SPOKEN
MAY 1, 1962

"NOTHING MAKES ANY
SENSE—NOTHING!"
— C. CRUMB

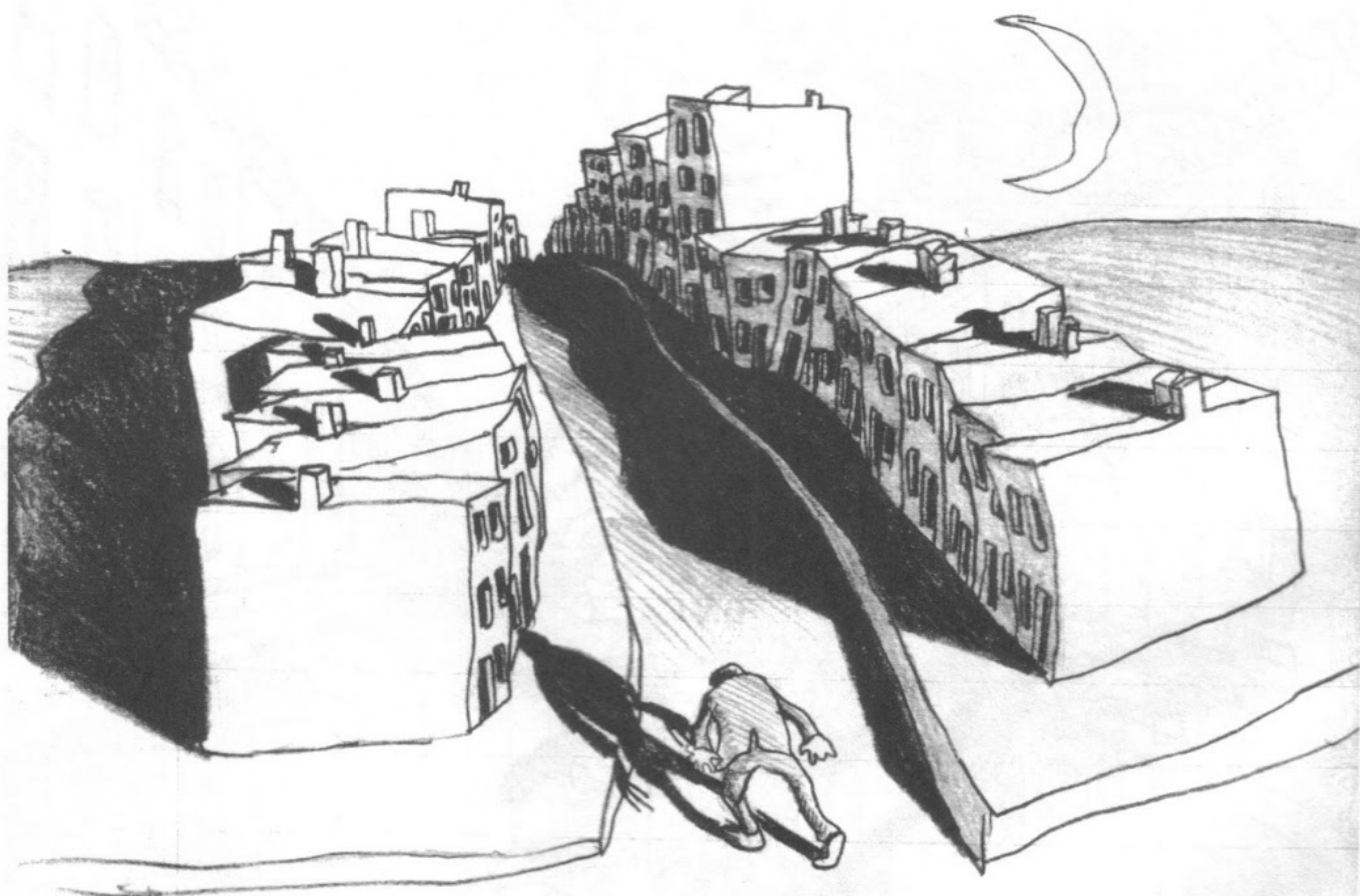
Marguerite
Clark
1911



PAGE
104







MAY 12, 1962



ARCADE

AUGUST 1962

NUMBER

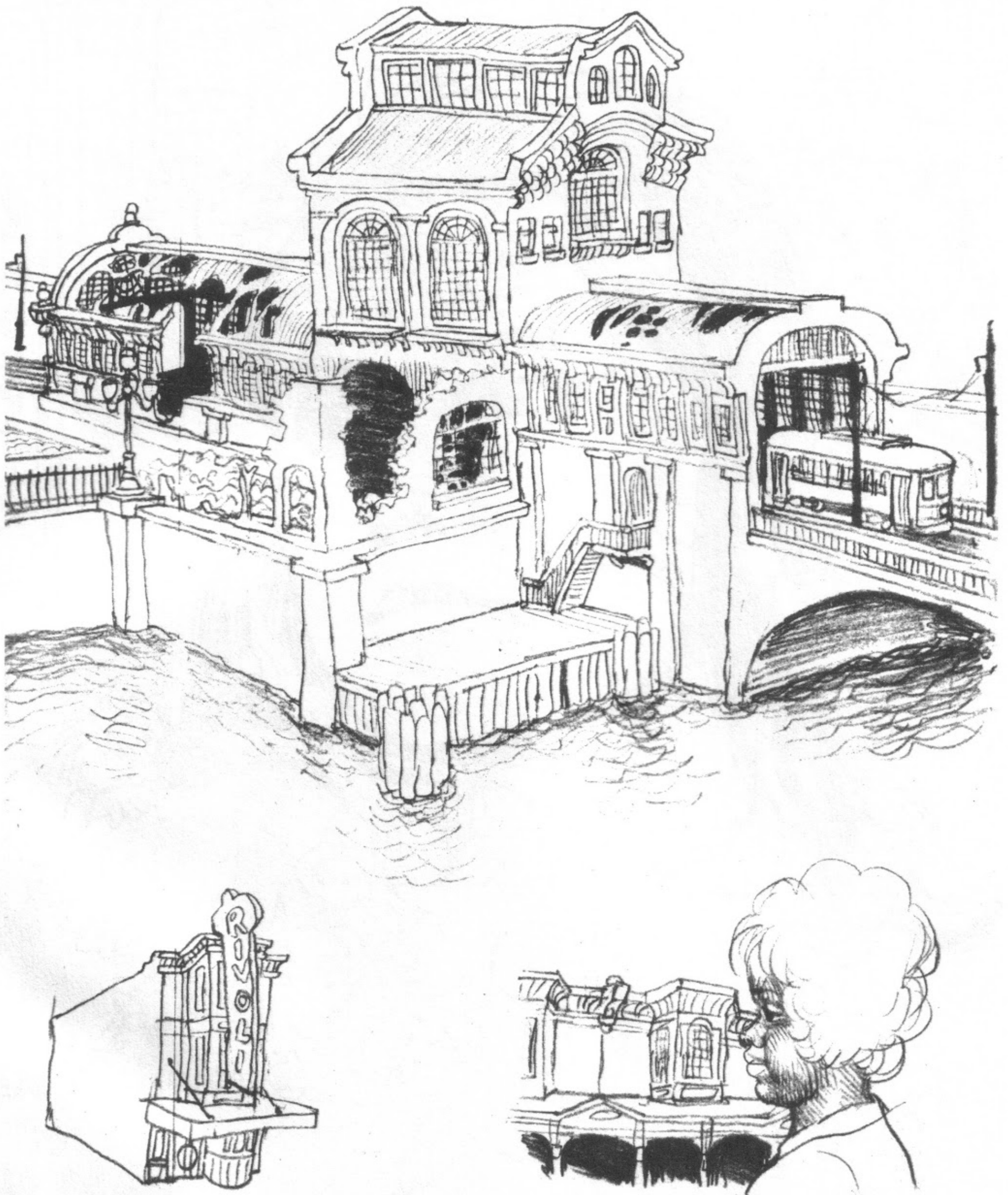
TWENTY-FIVE







"MABEL"
TABER
SEPTEMBER 1962







Elaine
May
September 23



Attention!

THIS IS THE FIRST
ISSUE OF "ARCADE"
IN TWO YEARS THAT
DOES NOT CONTAIN ONE
SINGLE DRAWING OF
MABEL!


MABEL













—continued from front flap

nation's potential invaders and blood enemies in Santo Domingo (this was before Viet Nam) seemed pretty far-fetched. Still, you never knew. . .

Robert remembers a roomful of "guys all giggling and cutting up. They told me to strip down and get in line. You're standing there in your shoes and socks and your underpants. Your valuables are in a pouch that they put around your neck with a string. They pulled me out of line right away. At that point I was in a complete state of terror, and horrified: 'Oh my God! This is it!'

"This guy came up and said, 'Go see that guy at Desk #7.' I went down there and the guy thumped me on the chest, wrote something down: 'That's 4F. That's "pectoral excavation."'

"When I think about that whole decade of the '60s," Robert laughs, "where I started to where I ended up, it's an amazing saga." One chance turn at this point, one casual decision—to go into commercial comic books, for example, or to turn his back on comics completely—and Robert might have altered his future totally. Picture R. Crumb as Frank Frazetta or Neal Adams or Pablo Picasso instead of "Mr. 1960s"!

One afternoon around this time the two of us were sitting in the living room under some framed color covers of the old *Life* humor magazine from the 1920s—Held's definitive depiction of the flappers, sheiks, and raccoon-coated bathtub gin era. "Maybe," I kidded, "you'll be the next one of these cartoonists of an era. Maybe you'll be the John Held, Jr. of the 1960s."

I'm not always a good prophet, but I was on the money that time!

—from the introduction
by Marty Pahl



R. Crumb in Cleveland, early 1964.

The Complete Crumb Comics: Some More Years of Bitter Struggle is the second in a multi-volume series comprising the complete works of the legendary cartoonist *R. Crumb*, one of America's most original, trenchant, and uncompromising satirists. The series will include the earliest, heretofore unpublished comic strips, as well as his sketchbooks, underground comix, dramatic and autobiographical strips, and his classic cartoon creations Fritz the Cat and Mr. Natural.



"When I think about that whole decade of the '60s," Robert [Crumb] laughs, "where I started to where I ended up, it's an amazing saga." One chance turn at this point, one casual decision—to go into commercial comic books, for example, or to turn his back on comics completely—and Robert might have altered his future totally. Picture R. Crumb as Frank Frazetta or Neal Adams or Pablo Picasso instead of "Mr. 1960s!"

One afternoon around this time the two of us were sitting in the living room under some framed color covers of the old *Life* humor magazine from the 1920s—Held's definitive depiction of the flappers, sheiks, and raccoon-coated bathtub gin era. "Maybe," I kidded, "you'll be the next one of these cartoonists of an era. Maybe you'll be the John Held, Jr. of the 1960s."

I'm not always a good prophet, but I was on the money that time!

MARTY PAHLS

from his introduction to this volume

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